THE EVIDENCE OF THE

WHAT IS IT?

FRANCISCO GARCÍA B

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DEDICATION

To God, the source of all truth and wisdom, whose grace sustained me at every stage of this journey and whose Word has been a constant lamp in my life. To Him, who called me from childhood, shaped me amid adversity, and granted me the privilege of serving Him, I dedicate this work as an act of obedience and gratitude.

To my beloved wife, María Elizabeth, faithful companion, wise counselor, and living testimony of the love that edifies. Her patience, strength, and faith have been pillars God has used to sustain my life and ministry. This work also belongs to her.

To my daughter Katherine, whose existence has been my motivation, responsibility, and blessing. May every page of this book remind her of God's faithfulness and the spiritual legacy I long to pass on to her. To Miguel, my son-in-law, I thank him for his love, integrity, and commitment to our family.

To my mother, Aura Lila, whose example of genuine faith shaped my spiritual formation and planted in me a love for Scripture. Her life is a testimony that transcends generations.

To the brothers and sisters in Christ whom the Lord has placed in my path over more than four decades of faith

journey. Each one has been God's instrument for my growth, character, and ministry. To the churches in Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and the United States that welcomed, trained, and walked alongside me, my heartfelt gratitude.

To all of them, and to those who long to deepen their understanding of the eternal Word, I offer this book with humility and hope, trusting the Lord will use it for edification, correction, and comfort.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I lift my gratitude to God for His unfathomable grace, inexhaustible love, and restoring forgiveness. He, who looked upon me with mercy even when my steps strayed, was pleased to reveal Himself to me as to one untimely born, to demonstrate the greatness of His compassion. I bless the Lord Jesus, who has allowed me to present this work to God's people—a yearning that burned in my heart for years with the desire to bless many lives.

To my beloved wife, María Elizabeth, whose love, patience, and companionship have been a beacon and refuge in my life and ministry. Without God and without her, none of this would have been possible. She has been the vessel chosen by the Lord to refine my character, to teach me that love and forgiveness can be lived with the same depth God grants them. To her, my sincere gratitude and enduring love.

To my daughter Katherine, whose existence has been my driving force and call to improve daily, to model Christ for her and guide her in the way of truth. Her birth has been the greatest blessing the Eternal One has bestowed upon any man. To Miguel, my son-in-law, a man of God sent at the appointed time, I thank him for his love and care for our daughter. May the Eternal One always pour out His grace and mercy upon him.

To my mother, Aura Lila, a woman of God who

taught me patience, perseverance, and humility in serving Christ and others. She is my Eunice, bearer of a genuine faith, an example of reverent love for God even amid prolonged struggles and trials that never extinguished her trust in the Lord. To her, my respect, admiration, and love.

To all the brothers and sisters in Christ whom He has placed in my path over more than forty years of faith journey. May God bless their lives without distinction, for each one has been an instrument in my spiritual growth. To the brothers and sisters in Miramontes, Nicaragua, where I experienced my first pastoral assignment and where the Lord worked wonders I cherish deep in my heart. To the pastors of District #5, whose love and support strengthened my ministry. To the brothers and sisters in Malacatoya, the second work God allowed me to undertake for His glory; we continue praying that one day we may see the fruit in Christ Jesus. To the brothers and sisters in Las Pilas. To the brothers and sisters in Belén, for their love and for receiving me as a servant of Christ. To Sister Julianita López and Sister María Gracia, who opened their home and heart to the preaching of the gospel; and to Brother Evaristo López, whose support marked my first steps in ministry.

My special gratitude to Quesada Durán Church in San José, Costa Rica, and to my pastor of many years, Tulio Cerda, for entrusting me with various areas of the Lord's work both in the local church and at the national level.

And to the beloved brothers and sisters of Beracah

Church in Trenton, New Jersey, for their love and fellowship toward us. May God bless them abundantly.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Francisco García was born in Granada, Nicaragua, in April 1974. His childhood was deeply influenced by the sociopolitical context of the 1979 transition war, an event that strengthened his family's spiritual life and solidified his formation in the Christian faith. As the firstborn of three siblings, he developed from an early age a marked interest in the systematic study of Scripture, beginning at age seven to memorize extensive biblical passages and various psalms—a practice that shaped his theological calling.

He completed his primary and secondary education in Managua, Nicaragua. Later, he trained as an English as a Second Language teacher at the Central American University, where he stood out for his academic excellence. The National Autonomous University of Nicaragua (UNAN) recognized him as the best tutor for senior students in the program, an honor that demonstrated his pedagogical ability and commitment to academic formation. He further complemented his training with theological studies at the Evangelical University of the Americas in San José, Costa Rica.

His interest in linguistics and biblical studies led him to master Spanish, English, and Portuguese, as well as devote over a decade to the study of biblical languages —Hebrew and Greek—. He studied Biblical Hebrew at the University of

Jerusalem and is currently continuing his education in modern Hebrew at an intermediate level.

Rooted in Pentecostal tradition, he has held various church leadership roles, including youth director, local men's ministry leader, federation president, and first president of the men's confederation in the Costa Rican church. His formal introduction to ministry took place in Nicaragua, where he was entrusted with preaching and pastoral oversight of the work in the Miramontes community. Under his leadership, that congregation grew from three initial members to over fifty. Later, he founded a new work in the Malacatoya community, starting it from the ground up.

His theological approach is based on prioritizing the authority of Scripture above institutional and church rules. This has sometimes caused tensions in his ministerial work. Nevertheless, his commitment to the faithful proclamation of biblical truth has remained unwavering. His life and ministry are centered around Galatians 1:10, a text that defines his pastoral ethics and his identity as a servant of Christ.

He currently resides in Trenton, New Jersey, where he continues to deepen his biblical studies and develops teaching work by offering virtual courses and studies aimed at believers in Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and the United States.

PROLOGUE

It is both an honor and a profound blessing for me to participate in the literary project of my esteemed fellow servant Francisco García, who grants me the privilege of writing this prologue. I have known Francisco for several years, since he was studying Theology at the Evangelical University of the Americas in San José, Costa Rica. Even then, I was struck by his inquisitive nature, intellectual discipline, and relentless pursuit of biblical truth. His approach to theological studies stood out for its balanced critical attitude, uncommon methodological rigor, and pastoral sensitivity that enriched his academic reflection.

Throughout the courses where I had the opportunity to accompany him as an instructor, I observed in him a constant principle: the primacy of biblical text above any denominational tradition or inherited theological construct. This faithfulness to scriptural testimony, combined with his ability to engage with diverse theological currents, allowed him to develop solid, respectful thinking deeply rooted in Scripture.

His training in biblical languages—Hebrew and Greek—provided him with hermeneutical tools that strengthened his analytical capacity and enabled him to address with greater objectivity topics that, in certain ecclesiastical contexts, often generate controversy. His

linguistic skill, along with his ministry experience and spiritual maturity, gives him the authority to present to God's people a work that blends doctrinal clarity, attention to pastoral needs, and careful study of sacred texts.

The book now in the reader's hands, The Evidence of the Spirit, addresses a theme that has been debated throughout church history: the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. Questions such as What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? How should we understand entire sanctification? or What is the evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit? have elicited various interpretations in theological and denominational circles. Each tradition has attempted to answer them from its own doctrinal framework, sometimes generating tensions, misunderstandings, and exclusionary positions.

In light of this, an approach that prioritizes biblical exegesis over preconceived theological systems is necessary. This present work takes up precisely that challenge: offering a reflection that springs from careful analysis of New Testament texts, illuminating Christian experience through a biblical theology that seeks to remain faithful to apostolic testimony. Francisco does not aim to impose a denominational stance but rather to guide readers toward a balanced, serious, and profoundly spiritual understanding of the Holy Spirit's work.

Francisco García's ministerial journey has also contributed to the maturity of his thought. He lived for many

years in Costa Rica, where I had the privilege of knowing him and accompanying him in his academic formation. Later, he returned to his native Nicaragua, where he served as a pastor and actively participated in founding and strengthening churches.

Subsequently, his relocation to the United States allowed him to broaden his ministerial experience and continue serving God's people in multicultural contexts. Despite the geographical distance, we have maintained a ministerial friendship characterized by mutual support, prayer, and collaboration in various initiatives, particularly in the missionary work I carry out among the Cabécar people in Costa Rica. Throughout this process, I have valued his integrity, his commitment to the Lord's work, and his passion for biblical teaching.

I believe this work will be of great doctrinal and pastoral value to believers, leaders, and Christian communities seeking clarity regarding the experience of the Holy Spirit. Francisco provides a detailed analysis of the key New Testament texts related to the topic. He dismantles mistaken ideas present in some religious circles and proposes a biblical spirituality that avoids the extremes of legalism, emotionalism, and denominational formalism. His call for a balanced faith—centered on Scripture and open to the transforming work of the Spirit—constitutes a valuable contribution to contemporary theological reflection.

I therefore recommend a careful reading of this work

to all who desire to deepen their understanding of the Holy Spirit and yearn to live an authentic Christian spirituality, free from artificiality and grounded in God's Word. I am convinced this book will edify many and contribute to the doctrinal and spiritual strengthening of the church.

My congratulations to my friend, brother in Christ, and ministerial colleague, Francisco García, for the effort, dedication, and seriousness with which he has prepared this work for the blessing of God's people in Latin America and the United States.

Dr. Ronald Vásquez Montero.
Missionary Pastor and Professor.

San José, Costa Rica.

ACADEMIC PREFACE

Theology, understood as fides quaerens intellectum, has historically been an effort to articulate the Christian faith through rigorous dialogue between Scripture, tradition, and human experience.

In this sense, the work now before the reader stands within the continuity of a reflection that—from the Church Fathers to contemporary theologians—has sought to comprehend God's revelation in an ever-changing world. Francisco García's contribution is part of this tradition, integrating elements of biblical exegesis, pastoral theology, and contemporary hermeneutics.

The author's hermeneutical approach engages with the historico--grammatical hermeneutic widely used in modern evangelical exegesis, while also incorporating insights from the phenomenological hermeneutics developed by Paul Ricoeur, who argues that the biblical text opens a "possible world" that confronts the reader from within their own existence[1].

This interaction between text and reader, far from being a merely intellectual exercise, becomes a space for spiritual transformation—something Francisco articulates with pastoral clarity and conceptual precision.

Likewise, the work reflects a theological sensitivity that

echoes Karl Barth's insistence on the sovereign character of God's Word as the starting point for all theological reflection[2]. Yet the author also acknowledges—in line with Jürgen Moltmann—that theology cannot divorce itself from the concrete hope embodied in human history[3]. This tension between revelation and experience, between transcendence and incarnation, becomes a unifying thread woven throughout the book's chapters.

Methodologically, the text benefits from an approach that integrates three fundamental dimensions:

1. **Responsible biblical exegesis**, which respects the biblical author's intent, literary genre, and historical context.

2. **Theological discernment**, which engages with contemporary currents such as narrative theology, practical theology, and Christian spirituality.

3. **Pastoral application**, which reflects Dietrich Bonhoeffer's concern for a faith lived out "in the midst of the world" rather than in isolation[4].

This methodological structure makes the work accessible without sacrificing depth, and academic without losing its pastoral dimension. The author demonstrates a solid understanding of Scripture, influenced by contemporary approaches such as those of N. T. Wright, who emphasizes the importance of reading the Bible within its grand

redemptive narrative[5]. This perspective is evident in how Francisco articulates the book's central themes, always connecting them to the story of salvation and the Church's mission today.

The author's ministerial experience—forged in communities across Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and the United States—adds a contextual dimension that enriches the work.

His theology is neither abstract nor rootless; it is an embodied, lived theology, tested in pastoral practice and the spiritual accompaniment of real people. In this sense, his work aligns with the tradition of practical theology, which seeks to integrate theory and praxis in an ongoing dialogue.

This preface does not aim to replace a reading of the book but to prepare the reader for a work that combines academic rigor, spiritual depth, and pastoral sensitivity. Francisco García offers here a valuable contribution to contemporary theological thought, a work that invites serious reflection, responsible discernment, and a more conscious and committed life of faith. With appreciation for the intellectual seriousness and spiritual maturity that converge in these pages, I leave the reader with a text that will undoubtedly enrich their understanding of the Christian faith and strengthen their walk with God.

Notes

Paul Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning (Fort Worth: Texas Christian

University Press, 1976).

Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics I/1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936).

Jürgen Moltmann, Theology of Hope (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics (New York: Macmillan, 1965).

N. T. Wright, The New Testament and the People of God (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

This work is built on the conviction that theology cannot be divorced from either Scripture or the lived experience of the Christian community. The method employed combines aspects of biblical exegesis, modern hermeneutics, and pastoral theology, aiming to strike a balance between serious academic study and practical application. This section seeks to provide the reader with a clear overview of the methodological approach underlying the development of the chapters.

1. Hermeneutical Approach

The biblical analysis in this book is based on the historico-grammatical hermeneutic, which seeks to understand the text in its original context, considering its literary structure, history, and theological purpose. However, recognizing that interpretation is not a neutral act, it also incorporates aspects of phenomenological hermeneutics, particularly the view of Paul Ricoeur, who argues that the text creates a "possible world" that calls to the reader from within their own life. This interaction between the world of the text and the world of the reader allows Scripture to be read not only as a historical document but as a living word that guides Christian praxis.

Likewise, the importance of **narrative theology**is acknowledged, which understands the Bible as a grand story of redemption.

2. Theological Framework

The theological reflection underpinning this work draws from various contemporary currents. It embraces **Karl Barth** 's insistence on the centrality of God's Word as the starting point for all theology, as well as the vision of **Jürgen Moltmann**, who proposes a theology oriented toward hope and historical transformation. Similarly, it incorporates the ethical and communal concerns of **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**, for whom the Christian faith must be lived out "in the midst of the world," in concrete engagement with reality.

These influences are not presented as rigid frameworks but as tools that enrich reflection and allow the topics addressed to be approached from a broad, critical, and contextualized perspective.

3. Integration of Theology and Pastoral Praxis

One of the methodological pillars of this work is the integration of theological reflection and pastoral experience. Theology, understood as a living discipline, cannot remain in the abstract realm; it must be embodied in the life of the community. Each chapter seeks to connect biblical interpretation with Christian practice, grounded in the idea of practical theology, which sees faith as an active process of understanding, action, and change.

The author's experience in ministry, developed across different cultures and religious communities, adds a practical

dimension that ensures his reflection focuses not only on ideas but also connects with the real lives of believers. This approach acknowledges that theology is built not only in books but also in daily life, in prayer, in service, and in community.

4. Analytical Structure

The method employed in this work can be summarized in three movements:

- **Exegesis:** Careful analysis of the biblical text, considering its form, context, and purpose.
- **Theology:** conceptual articulation connecting the text with Christian tradition and contemporary challenges.
- **Pastoral Application:** Translation of theological reflection into practical guidance for spiritual and communal life.

This framework allows each chapter to progress organically from textual understanding to the living out of faith, maintaining a balance between academic depth and pastoral relevance.

5. Purpose of the Method

The aim of this methodological approach is not to impose a single interpretation but to provide a solid framework enabling readers to think, discern, and live out their faith with greater clarity. In this sense, theology is not presented as a closed system but as a path of continual seeking, dialogue, and growth.

INTRODUCTION

Some doctrines are easily discussed because they remain distant from daily life. Others—without fanfare—end up setting a congregation's rhythm, shaping its language, expectations, and even how people view one another. How a church defines "the evidence" of the filling of the Spirit belongs to this second category. This is no peripheral matter. It touches the spiritual security of many believers, the health of public worship, and the very understanding of holiness.

In numerous contemporary Pentecostal contexts, an idea has taken root that—through decades of repetition—has become nearly unquestionable: speaking in tongues is the normative sign that a person has been filled with the Spirit. For some, this phrase functions as a simple, quick thermometer. For others, as a spiritual goal to achieve. And for not a few, as a boundary separating the "truly spiritual" from those just beginning—or worse, from those supposedly lacking the Spirit altogether. The question is inevitable: does Scripture truly teach that this is the normative evidence for everyone?

This book stems from pastoral concern rather than polemical intent. Over years of ministry, I have heard sincere testimonies and also painful silences. I have seen believers weep at an altar—not from lack of repentance or absence of faith, but from feeling "incomplete" before God because they could not produce a specific manifestation. I have seen young people who love Christ, who strive to live in purity, who serve faithfully, yet bear the implicit label of "not yet." I have also seen the opposite: people who confidently lean on a past charismatic experience while their daily lives remain

dominated by anger, deceit, pride, or immorality. In both cases, there is real harm, because the visible is confused with the true, and the emotional with the spiritual.

Let me say this respectfully: the problem is not the people. Many of them have a genuine hunger for God. The problem is a misplaced definition—a way of measuring the Spirit's work that, in practice, ends up substituting the fruit for the sign, character for the moment, transformation for the experience. When a church teaches that the primary evidence of the Spirit is a specific manifestation, the emphasis shifts almost imperceptibly. The priority ceases to be conformity to Christ and becomes the attainment of a phenomenon. And when that happens, the Christian life is impoverished.

Scripture, however, does not leave us without parameters. If the issue were simply "Do spiritual gifts exist?" the biblical answer would be clear: yes. If the question were "Can God give tongues?" again: yes. But the central matter is different. The question is whether the Bible presents speaking in tongues as the normative and universal evidence of the filling of the Holy Spirit—or whether it instead situates it within a diversity of gifts and, above all, subjects all charismatic exercise to criteria of edification, order, and love. And when one takes the epistles seriously, especially 1 Corinthians and Galatians, the discussion takes on a different hue. It no longer revolves around the spectacular but around the essential.

Paul wrote to a church that was intensely charismatic and profoundly immature. Corinth had gifts, but also divisions. It had spiritual expressions, but tolerated grave sins. It had enthusiasm, but lacked discernment. That combination remains relevant today. It is possible to have a worship service filled with manifestations and, at the same time, a community

weak in holiness, fragile in unity, and shallow in doctrine. That is why 1 Corinthians is a providential laboratory: it shows how the Spirit works, yes—but also how the human heart can disorder even what it claims to seek from God.

A careful reading of 1 Corinthians 12–14 makes it evident that the apostle does not construct a hierarchy where one gift is the mandatory seal for all. His emphasis, on the contrary, highlights diversity: the same Spirit distributes to each one individually as He wills. The image of the body was not chosen at random. A healthy body is not one with a single oversized organ, but one that functions as a whole. When a congregation elevates one gift to the status of universal evidence, it ends up acting as if the entire body had to be an eye or a hand. And Paul not only corrects this logic—he corrects it with pastoral firmness, because he knows what it produces: spiritual pride in some and frustration in others.

Yet Paul's correction does not stop at ordering the gifts. It goes deeper. Right in the middle of the charismatic debate, he inserts the chapter many prefer to quote at weddings but forget in church: 1 Corinthians 13. There, the apostle establishes a measure that depends not on a moment of worship but on a life. If someone speaks in the tongues of men and angels but does not have love, they are a resounding gong. This is an uncomfortable statement for any tradition that conflates sound with spirituality. Love is not an accessory for the Christian; it is proof that life is being governed by Christ's Spirit. And if love is the criterion, then the evidence cannot be reduced to a manifestation, because love is recognized in conduct, in patience, in truth, in service, in forgiveness, and in how the weak are treated.

This leads to a decisive point: the Holy Spirit was not given to produce an isolated sign but to form a people like Jesus. The most reliable evidence of His work is not the intensity of a worship service but the sustained transformation of a life. That is why Galatians 5 does not list experiences but fruits: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. It is significant that Paul calls this "fruit." Fruit is not manufactured by sheer willpower nor imitated under social pressure. It grows. It takes time. It is seen in different seasons. And it appears where life is connected to the right source.

Consider a common scene. Two people wake up on Sunday and go to church. One participates intensely, gets emotional, even publicly expresses a gift. The other sings more softly, prays simply, listens attentively.

On the way out, the first humiliates their family in the car with harsh words; the second returns home, engages in conversation, asks for forgiveness if they failed, honors their commitments, guards their character. Which of the two more clearly shows the Spirit's work? The answer is as evident as it is uncomfortable. And precisely because of that discomfort, many prefer a quicker, more measurable, more impressive criterion. But God cannot be reduced to a method.

When the wrong evidence is adopted, the consequences multiply. Personally, it opens the door to self-deception: "I'm right with God because I had such-and-such experience." Communally, it creates a culture of comparison: "Those who speak in tongues are first-class, the rest are second-class." Doctrinally, it weakens the gospel, because the center shifts from Christ and His work to a seal that, in practice, ends up functioning as a requirement for acceptance.

And pastorally, it forms a generation that seeks sensations but not necessarily holiness. How can we not be concerned if the result is a church with much spiritual language but little crucified life?

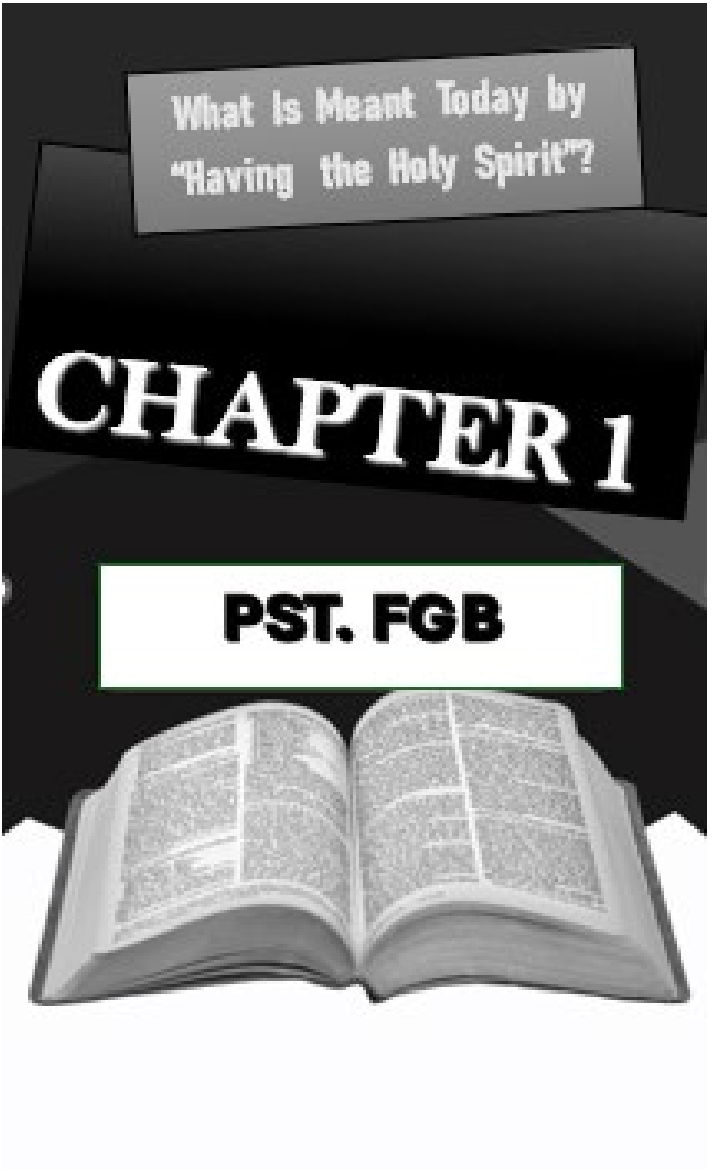
This book does not seek to quench genuine fire or despise what God does. The intention is simpler and more demanding: to measure everything again by Scripture. Instead of first asking, "Was a gift manifested?" it is better to ask, "Was the church built up?", "Was there order?", "Was Christ exalted?", "Was love promoted?", "Was holiness strengthened?" These questions are not enemies of the spiritual. They are precisely the kind of discernment the apostles taught. A movement that does not produce reverence, obedience, and transformation must be examined, even if it is popular. And a life that bears fruit, even if quiet, deserves to be recognized as God's work.

Honesty about ecclesial reality is also needed. In many congregations, what is called "tongues" does not follow the apostolic criteria of 1 Corinthians 14: interpretation, taking turns, limited number, purpose of edification, silence when there is no interpreter. Sometimes it is presented as a sign of freedom when it is actually disobedience disguised as spirituality. And if anything characterizes the Holy Spirit in Scripture, it is that He does not contradict the Word He Himself inspired. There is no clash between Spirit and Scripture; the clash is between our traditions and biblical teaching.

These pages are an invitation to recover the center. For leaders, to shepherd the flock with biblical criteria, not cultural pressure. For believers, to rest in Christ's work and seek the filling of the Spirit with a hunger for holiness, not a

craving for demonstration. For those wounded by unfair comparisons, to know that God does not measure as man measures. And for those who feel secure because of a past experience, to examine themselves in light of present fruit.

The evidence of the Spirit is not reduced to a voice, a moment, or an expression. The evidence of the Spirit is recognized when sin loses ground, when pride is broken, when the tongue is restrained, when forgiveness becomes possible, when love ceases to be theory and becomes practice. In other words, when Christ begins to be visible in the ordinary. There, in the everyday ground where almost no one applauds, is where the Spirit often gives His clearest testimony. And if that is the evidence, then the call is not to pursue a phenomenon but to surrender to God's governance with an obedient, humble, and persevering faith.


What Is Meant Today by
"Having the Holy Spirit"?
CHAPTER 1
PST. FGB

In many contemporary Pentecostal congregations, the question "Do you have the Holy Spirit?" is rarely understood as an inquiry about the believer's inner life. Nor is it received as an invitation to examine daily obedience, humility, purity of conscience, or real progress in holiness. In practice, it usually functions as a technical question with an expected answer: "Yes, because I speak in tongues."

This association, repeated for years from pulpits, discipleship sessions, and testimonies, has ended up shaping its own vocabulary. People speak of "having" the Spirit as if it were a credential verifiable through a specific sign—almost like a spiritual certificate. The result is that the biblical concept of the Spirit's work is reduced to a moment, a concrete experience, a manifestation that can be described in a few minutes. And yet, when one opens the New Testament carefully, they discover that the Spirit's work is broader, deeper, and—to be honest—more demanding.

In pastoral conversations, a pattern repeats. A person approaches with joy and says, "I've received." When asked to explain what they mean, they recount an intense scene: music, tears, repeated phrases, a strong impulse in their chest, and finally, words they don't understand. They were assured this was the evidence. They were congratulated. They were told they were now complete, sealed, filled. Weeks later, that same person returns to the pastor for another reason: their marriage is broken, their temper hasn't changed, lying remains an easy way out, their relationship with Scripture is almost nonexistent, and resentment still governs their reactions. Then an uncomfortable question arises—one few dare to ask: if the sign has already appeared, why isn't the fruit growing?

The problem is not in the emotion or the desire. God does not despise a sincere heart.[1] The problem is doctrinal and pastoral: what it means to "have the Holy Spirit" has been redefined in a way that doesn't always align with apostolic teaching. The redefinition of a spiritual reality also entails a reconfiguration of the believer's assurance, maturity, and concept of salvation.

"Having the Spirit" in the common language of many churches has become a kind of boundary. On one side are those who speak in tongues, considered "filled" or "baptized." On the other, those who don't, seen as incomplete believers—sometimes even suspect.[2] Though not stated outright, it's conveyed through gestures, silences, and internal categories people quickly learn. This creates a two-tiered Christianity. It produces anxiety in some and pride in others. And most gravely, it shifts the center of evidence from character to manifestation.

Scripture, however, presents the Spirit's presence as the seal of belonging to Christ. Paul states clearly that "if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to him".[3] This statement doesn't sound like a privilege for an elite but a basic reality for every Christian. It's not an optional accessory but the very foundation of the new life. If this is true, the question cannot be resolved solely by an external act. It must be addressed in light of union with Christ, the new birth, faith, and Jesus' real lordship in one's life.

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[1] (Ps 51:17 KJV)

[2] Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, The Baptism and Filling of the Spirit, p.814

[3] (Rom 8:9)

Here, it's helpful to make a distinction often blurred in practice: one thing is to affirm that the Holy Spirit can manifest with gifts, including tongues, and another is to say that this manifestation is the normative evidence that the Spirit dwells in someone. The first recognizes God's freedom and the diversity of His work. The second establishes a universal rule Scripture doesn't formulate this way—and one that also produces serious consequences.

In popular Pentecostal settings, "having the Spirit" usually describes an event subsequent to conversion, marked by a strong sensory component. It's recounted as a second experience, distinct and necessary to live "in victory." Not a few testimonies include phrases like, "Before, I was converted, but now I've truly received power." The intention is good. We all want to experience God's help. Yet when it's taught that the evidence of this experience is singular, biblical richness is reduced, and the door is opened to imitation and social pressure.

The pressure exists, even if denied. Who wants to be the only one who comes forward and returns to their seat without "having received"? Who wants to be the young person told, with pious but firm words, that they still don't have the Spirit because they didn't utter certain syllables? In such contexts, the human heart learns to survive. Some convince themselves that any babbling will do. Others repeat sounds they've heard. Others engage in self-suggestion. And others, more honest, grow frustrated and feel spiritually inferior. In any case, the evaluation criterion is not holiness but experience.

The New Testament does not present the Spirit's work as a medal to display but as the active presence of God

that produces life, conviction of sin, love for Christ, understanding of truth, and power to obey. Jesus spoke of the Spirit as the one who glorifies the Son, not as one who displaces Him.[4] When the Spirit works, the normal result is not the exaltation of a manifestation but the exaltation of Christ and tangible transformation in the disciple.

This is where many become confused: they think the evidence of the Spirit must necessarily be striking, visible, and quick. But the Bible insists on slower evidence—and precisely for that reason, more reliable. A life that learns to control the tongue at home, asks for forgiveness without excuses, abandons hidden practices, honors commitments at work, resists temptation when no one is watching, endures trials without bitterness, loves the difficult brother.

Is that not power? Is that not supernatural? It just isn't spectacular.

In years of pastoral counseling, I've seen cases that illustrate this difference. I remember a man who spoke in tongues fluently, participated enthusiastically, and was the first to raise his hands. Yet at work, he habitually stole leftover materials and justified it with the phrase: "Everyone does it." When confronted, he took offense and accused others of lacking love. I also recall a humble woman with no dramatic experiences, who served quietly, cared for the elderly, prayed persistently, and maintained remarkable peace amid prolonged family suffering. If one had to decide who displayed more evidence of the Spirit, what would a sincere heart answer?

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[4] (John 16:14)

The question becomes even more serious when we consider that gifts, by their nature, can operate in immature people. Paul writes to the Corinthians—a church abundant in manifestations—yet calls them "carnal" and "infants in Christ".[5] He doesn't deny the reality of their gifts but confronts their lack of character. This should give us pause. If a congregation can operate in gifts while walking in jealousy, strife, and divisions, then gifts cannot function as the ultimate measure of spirituality.

The popular concept of "having the Spirit" often ignores another key aspect: the Spirit isn't received just to feel but to live. The Spirit's presence is verified in the direction life takes. Paul doesn't speak of the Spirit as a badge but as one who guides, puts to death the works of the flesh, and produces a lifestyle consistent with the gospel. Where the Spirit governs, sin isn't treated lightly. Where the Spirit governs, the conscience becomes sensitive. Where the Spirit governs, Scripture ceases to be an ornament and becomes nourishment.

This doesn't mean every Spirit-filled person is perfect. No one is. Rather, it means there are clear, persistent signs of real work: repentance when one falls, thirst for obedience, growth in love, rejection of hypocrisy, fear of God. The evidence isn't an isolated spark but a trajectory.

We should also recognize this: a wrong definition of evidence produces two kinds of deception. The first is deception by false assurance. Someone believes they're right with God because of an experience, even if their life denies the Lord they confess. The second is deception by false

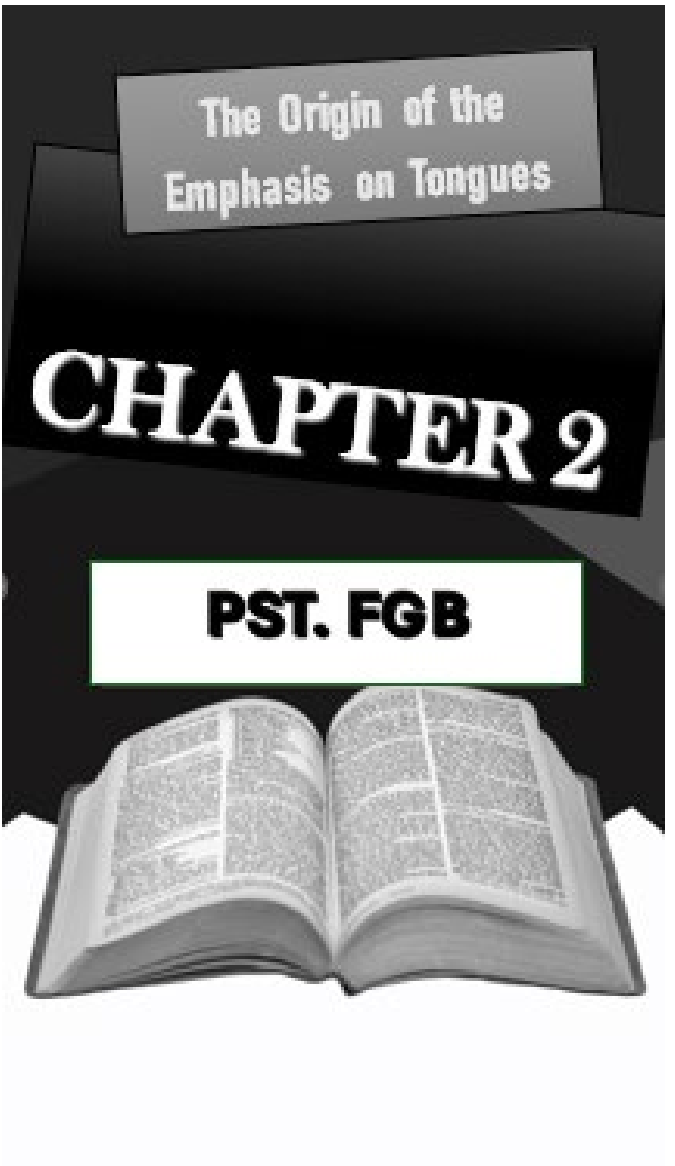
[5] 5 (1 Cor 3:1-3)

condemnation. Someone who loves Christ, strives to obey, and bears genuine fruit considers themselves incomplete or rejected because they haven't manifested a certain gift. Both deceptions wound the church and obscure the gospel.

That's why the question "What is understood today by having the Holy Spirit?" isn't a peripheral debate. The answer determines how we disciple, examine the heart, exercise leadership, and comfort those who struggle. If the main criterion is an external sign, discipleship becomes shallow. But when the emphasis is on fruit and obedience, discipleship becomes realistic—perhaps slower, but far more faithful.

The solution isn't to despise the charismatic or ridicule those who've experienced manifestations. The solution is to put everything in its biblical place. The Spirit distributes gifts as He wills, but He also produces character as ongoing evidence. And if we must seek a reliable sign of His fullness, the most biblical one isn't what's spoken but what's lived.

Ultimately, the decisive question isn't "Can you prove it with an experience?" but "Is Christ evident in how you speak, make decisions, treat your family, handle money, respond to conflict, resist temptation?" That question isn't answered in a service but in the routine of the week. And it is precisely there, in the everyday, that the Holy Spirit often gives His clearest evidence.


The Origin of the
Emphasis on Tongues
CHAPTER 2
PST. FGB

THE ORIGIN

To understand why so many believers today automatically associate the filling of the Spirit with speaking in tongues, we must look back honestly—not to mock anyone or discredit sincere experiences, but to recognize how collective convictions are formed. Many ideas become "obvious" over time, even if they didn't originate from a complete reading of Scripture but from a mix of history, pastoral necessity, and repeated tradition.

There's a simple fact that often goes unnoticed: Christianity didn't begin as a homogeneous movement. The first believers didn't have systematic manuals or closed theological categories from the start. They had the Old Testament, apostolic testimony, and a congregational life under construction. In that context, certain events recorded in Acts inevitably drew powerful attention. And among them, the phenomenon of speaking in other tongues stands out for its public, visible, and hard-to-ignore nature.

The biblical story everyone remembers is Pentecost. There was a sound like a mighty wind, tongues of fire appeared, and people heard the disciples speaking in their own languages.[6] It was a striking sign. Who wouldn't be moved? Who wouldn't want something so

[6] (Acts 2:1-11)

tangible in their own life? The problem isn't in acknowledging that this event was real and significant. The problem arises when an inaugural, extraordinary account with a specific purpose is turned into a universal norm for every believer in every era—as if the Spirit only evidenced Himself that way.

From there, an idea takes shape: if in Acts, at several points, speaking in tongues appears associated with receiving the Spirit, then it must be the evidence. This was the reasoning and conclusion reached by Charles Parham. Parham was the first in the modern era to associate glossolalia (speaking in tongues) with the experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit.[7] The reasoning sounds logical when stated quickly. But the Bible isn't interpreted by adding scenes without hearing the New Testament's complete argument. Acts narrates missionary expansion and historical transitions; the epistles teach doctrine for the church's ordinary life. If that priority is reversed, the church ends up building a spirituality based on exceptional episodes rather than apostolic teaching for all.

In later Christian history, the emphasis on tongues didn't always occupy center stage. There were records of charismatic manifestations in certain periods and contexts, yes—such as the Great Awakening, Wesleyanism and Methodism in the 18th century, and the Holiness Movement in the early 19th century—but not as a

[7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Fox_Parham

dominant doctrinal axis. For centuries, the main discussion about the Spirit's work revolved more around sanctification, prayer, testimony, character, power to endure persecution, and doctrinal faithfulness. The pastoral question wasn't "Did you speak in tongues?" but "Are you walking in obedience?", "Are you growing in love?", "Are you persevering in faith?" No one would claim the church was always exemplary, but the point is that the center of gravity lay elsewhere.

The modern turn toward tongues as normative evidence consolidated primarily in revival movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[8] Here something occurred that is pastorally understandable: communities sought a clear experience of God, something confirming heaven still acted with power. In an industrializing world growing colder and more rationalist, many believers felt faith had become formal. There were correct sermons but lifeless lives. There was doctrine but little spiritual expectation. In that setting, a visible manifestation like tongues offered immediate certainty. If someone could say "it happened to me," it was no longer just about ideas but experience.

We must also acknowledge a rarely mentioned human element: the need for a distinctive mark. Emerging movements often seek signs to differentiate themselves—not always from pride, sometimes for survival. A small

[8] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azusa_Street_Revival

community criticized by other churches needs to know who “our people” are and what “being in the fire” means. In that process, a striking gift can become an identity marker. And when a marker becomes identity, it soon becomes doctrine. What may have begun as testimony ends up as examination.

Here emerges a known phenomenon in church life: when an experience is elevated to mandatory evidence, it creates spiritual pressure producing two results. First, many genuine believers are wounded—because they love the Lord, have been transformed, but can’t affirm what’s demanded of them. Second, others end up imitating what they see to avoid feeling excluded. No one says it out loud, but the atmosphere communicates: "If it hasn't happened to you, you're incomplete." Over time, this pressure forms a common language, a congregational culture, even a way to measure maturity.

There are many examples of men who, perhaps with good intentions, have always sought ways for the church to distinguish itself from the practices of organizations that are not of God. Unfortunately, the lives of most of these men raise serious questions; such is the case of a converted pagan priest named Montanus, who began opposing the secularization and worldliness of the church in the latter part of the 2nd century. Montanus claimed to have the gift of prophecy. He prophesied in the first person, leading many to believe it was truly the

manifestation of the Comforter promised by Christ in John 14 and 16. According to Eusebius, the ancient church historian, Montanus would suddenly fall into an ecstatic frenzy and utter strange things. Eusebius quotes Apollinaris, bishop of Hierapolis, who maintained that Montanus's prophecy was "somewhat contrary to the custom of the Church, handed down by tradition from the beginning".[9] According to Apollinaris, the Montanists "spoke wildly, irrationally, and strangely."[10] [11]

I remember the case of a young man who approached me after a meeting. He wasn't rebellious or superficial. He read his Bible, served, struggled to remain upright. With red eyes, he confessed he'd spent months asking to "receive" because he'd been told that without tongues, he didn't have the Spirit. He described entire nights in anguish, repeating sounds, trying to "release his tongue," only to end up feeling empty. The question consuming him was simple: "Why doesn't God hear me?" I had to respond with another question, more biblical and liberating: "Who told you the Spirit is measured that way?" Sometimes, false evidence doesn't just confuse. Sometimes it destroys the peace of someone already in

[9] Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, editors, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, Vol. 1, translated into English with prologue and explanatory notes (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1890), p. 231.
[10] Ibid., p. 231
[11] Arthur J. Clement, Pentecostals and Charismatics, A Confessional Lutheran Evaluation, p.14

Christ.

In some contexts, the emphasis was reinforced by a partial reading of Acts, particularly noting that in certain episodes tongues are mentioned while in others they are not. But instead of accepting that the text presents diverse signs according to the moment's purpose, a uniform conclusion was adopted. Thus a kind of "pattern" was constructed: Spirit received equals tongues. What didn't fit was explained as an exception or silenced. And when a doctrine constantly needs to explain exceptions, perhaps the problem isn't the text but the lens through which it's being read.

Moreover, the centrality of tongues benefited from their convenience as "proof." This sounds harsh, but it's real. Measuring the fruit of the Spirit[12] takes time. Evaluating love, self-control, and gentleness requires shared life, conflicts, difficult decisions, and perseverance. In contrast, an audible manifestation can happen in minutes. It gives a sense of quick spiritual achievement. And in a culture accustomed to immediacy, that speed is appealing. Who wouldn't prefer an instant marker over a slow, demanding transformation process?

The problem is that Scripture never treats maturity as something instantaneous. Paul doesn't speak as if character were downloaded from heaven in an emotional moment. He speaks of crucifying the flesh,

[12] (Gal 5:22)

persevering, learning contentment, enduring with patience, loving when it's costly. And when he writes to the Corinthians—a church abundant in gifts but poor in maturity—he makes clear that the spectacular can coexist with the carnal. That fact alone should sound an alarm. If a congregation can have manifestations while also having divisions, pride, immorality, and disorder, then manifestations cannot be the definitive evidence of the filling.

There's another theological factor that drove the modern emphasis: separating conversion from the filling of the Spirit as two rigid stages, then seeking a universal sign for the second.[13] In some circles, salvation became "the beginning," and the charismatic experience became "the proof that now you really have it." The practical result is delicate: believers who trust in Christ end up living as if they still lacked something essential, and others begin classifying God's people into categories: those who "have" and those who "don't have," the "on fire" and the "cold," often without knowing their actual life, obedience, or growth.

The lingering question is inevitable: if the Spirit wanted His presence always recognized by the same audible sign, why don't the epistles, when instructing the churches, establish that criterion as universal proof? Why doesn't Paul, when encouraging the saints, tell them,

[13] Denzel R. Miller, From Azusa to Africa and the Nations, Appendix 1, pp. 61-64

"Make sure you speak in tongues"? Instead, he insists on faith working through love, on holiness, unity, sobriety, and the edification of the body. The evidence most strongly highlighted in the New Testament isn't a moment of ecstasy but a life changing direction.

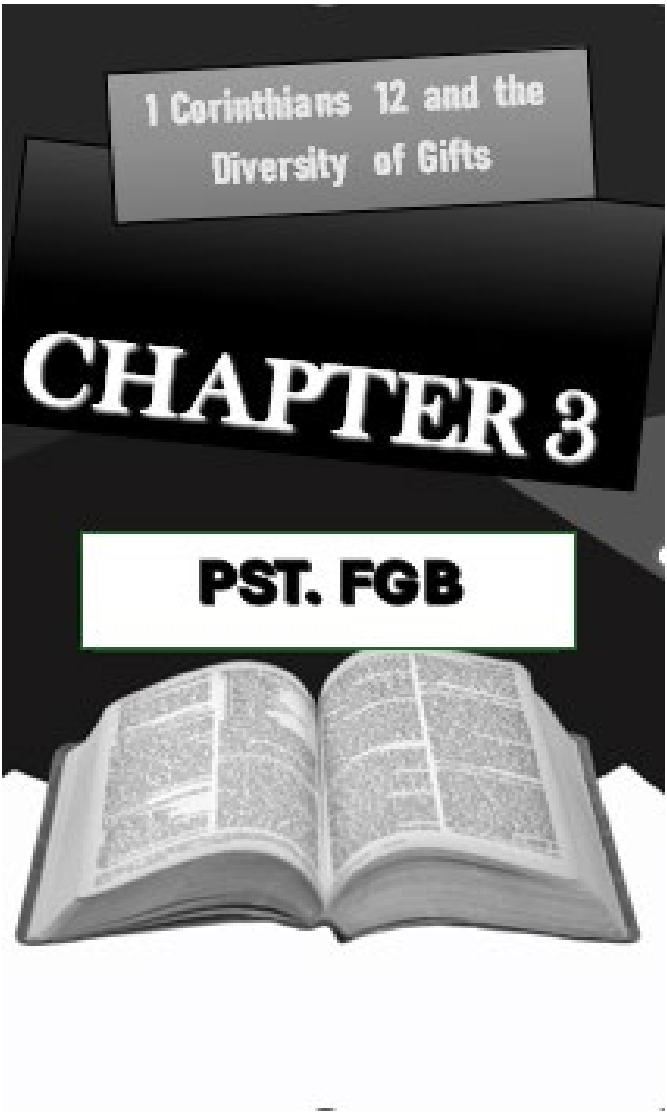
This isn't about despising gifts or denying that God can manifest in surprising ways. It's about putting each thing in its proper place. When a church focuses where Scripture does not, sooner or later it reaps confusion. And when what the Bible presents as "diverse" is presented as "normative,"[14] the community ends up measuring spirituality with the wrong ruler.

History helps because it exposes a pattern: what began as a legitimate longing for spiritual life became, in many cases, a narrow definition of evidence. And when evidence narrows, the gospel shrinks in practice.[15] The Spirit's work isn't limited to one manifestation. The Spirit forms Christ in us. And that formation shows most in what we do when no one applauds, in how we respond under pressure, in how we speak to family, in honesty with money, in humility to ask forgiveness.

If historical emphasis led us to confuse sign with essence, it's wise to pause and listen carefully to the apostle again—especially when he speaks of gifts, love, and

[14] (1 Cor 12:4-11)
[15] Denzel R. Miller, From Azusa to Africa and the Nations, Appendix 1, pp. 61-64

edification. There the map becomes clear. Not to quench the fire, but to avoid mistaking it for smoke.


1 Corinthians 12 and the
Diversity of Gifts
CHAPTER 3
PST. FGB

Few things damage church life as much as taking a gift from God and turning it into a gauge of spirituality. What was given to serve ends up used to classify. What should edify divides. And what should produce gratitude produces anxiety. On that soil grows false hierarchy: one gift becomes a crown, the others become steps.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul confronts a problem very similar to what still breathes in many congregations today. The Corinthians valued the spectacular, the visible, what made an impact. That inclination hasn't disappeared; it just changed venues. Sometimes it dresses as "revival," other times as "power," other times as "anointing." But the heart of the matter is the same: when a manifestation becomes the center, Christ's body begins revolving around what's flashy rather than what's necessary.

Paul doesn't begin by forbidding gifts or denying the supernatural. He begins by ordering their understanding: "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed."[16] The problem wasn't having gifts but ignoring their purpose. And when purpose is ignored, rules are invented. For example, assuming a certain gift proves someone "has arrived," that they're more spiritual, more filled, more approved. Isn't that a religious way of seeking security?

[16] (1 Cor 12:1)

One Spirit, Many Expressions

Paul insists on one idea repeatedly: diversity. "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all."[17] This threefold affirmation isn't decoration. It's a vaccine against spiritual elitism.

If the Spirit is the same, no one can boast superiority as if receiving a higher-grade Spirit. If the Lord is the same, no one can turn their function into a throne. If God is the same, no one can say their way of serving makes them more essential than another. For Paul, diversity isn't a problem to correct but a richness to protect.

Here it's good to pause on an often-overlooked phrase: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." Not "for prestige," not "for identity," not "to show who's more filled." For the common good—that is, for others' benefit. This completely changes the focus. A gift isn't a personal medal; it's a communal tool. If my "evidence" doesn't benefit the body, then I'm not understanding Christ's mind.

Consider a simple example. One brother may have a gift for teaching Scripture with clarity. That teaching orders the Church's faith, corrects errors, comforts those

[17] (1 Cor 12:4-6)

struggling, encourages new believers. Another may have notable pastoral sensitivity: calls the sick, visits the discouraged, walks with those ready to quit. Would anyone dare say that's less spiritual than a more visible manifestation? And yet in practice, many communities have treated as "second-class Christians" those who don't fit the spectacular mold.

Paul wouldn't allow it. For him, the Spirit manifests to build up the church, not to impress the crowd.

The List of Gifts and the Temptation of Hierarchy

1 Corinthians 12 lists several gifts: utterance of wisdom, utterance of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, ability to distinguish spirits, various kinds of tongues, and interpretation. The mere existence of this list already challenges any attempt to reduce the Spirit's evidence to a single sign.

But the problem isn't just reduction. There's also ranking. Many treat this list as if it were a ladder: at the top the most showy, at the bottom the most quiet. Paul does the opposite. He presents variety and then emphasizes that "all these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills." That last phrase unsettles anyone who wants to control spirituality. "As he wills" means the Spirit doesn't submit to our tradition, our preferences, or our congregational pressure. It means we can't manufacture uniformity through

insistence. When people are pushed to seek a specific manifestation to "fit in," there's a serious risk: some may imitate, exaggerate, or pretend—not because they love deception but because they fear being seen as less spiritual. And a church that pushes its members toward performance, even unintentionally, is cultivating a culture of appearance.

This isn't theoretical. I've seen it in private conversations, away from the altar and the music. People who confess shamefully: "It didn't happen for me," "I feel like I'm missing something," "Everyone looks at me strangely," "I want to be filled too." The inevitable question: who taught them that the filling of the Spirit is measured by a single manifestation? Certainly not the Spirit speaking through Paul.

One Body, Not a Stage

The body metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12 is one of the most pastoral and practical in the entire New Testament. Paul doesn't speak of an army of supergifted individuals but of an organism. A body functions through cooperation, not competition.

"If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' would it therefore no longer belong to the body?" This question reveals a wound: spiritual inferiority complex. When a church preaches or suggests there's one gift that proves who truly belongs, the

foot begins doubting itself. And at the same time, the hand starts thinking itself indispensable.

Paul also confronts superiority complex: "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'" In modern terms, no one can say, "If you haven't had this experience, you don't contribute," or "if you don't express yourself like I do, you're not part of us." Christ's body isn't a club of uniform experiences. It's a community of diverse functions under the same Lord.

The body's logic also dismantles the idea that what's most visible is most important. Paul insists that the members which seem weaker are actually the most necessary. And he adds something profoundly countercultural: the members we consider less presentable we clothe with greater honor. The point is clear: God doesn't think like we do. God honors what many overlook.

In a church, who sustains new believers' perseverance? Often it's not the loudest speaker but the sister who prays quietly, the couple that opens their home, the leader who listens without judging, the believer who serves faithfully without seeking recognition. Isn't that the Spirit's work? Isn't that real, daily evidence measurable in fruit?

"Do all speak in tongues?"

Paul concludes his argument with a series of rhetorical questions that—taken seriously—should settle the debate about "normative evidence." Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?... Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?"[18] The structure itself demands an answer: no. Not everyone fulfills the same role. Not everyone receives the same gift. Not everyone manifests the same way.

Here Scripture is direct. If Paul asks "Do all speak in tongues?" it's because he acknowledges not all do. And if not all do, then it can't be the universal marker of the Spirit's filling. To make it a common requirement goes against the passage's logic.

Sometimes someone responds: "But Paul is talking about ministries, not evidence." Yet the text isn't limited to offices; it includes gifts and operations of the Spirit. And the overarching argument remains: diversity is intentional, not accidental. The Spirit distributes as he wills. The church receives with gratitude. No one has the right to impose uniformity where God established variety.

This clarity, of course, doesn't eliminate the pastoral question: if it's not a single sign, then how do we recognize the Spirit's work? The answer will sharpen as we progress,

[18] 18 (1 Cor 12:29-31)

but it's already visible here: the primary evidence isn't uniformity of experience but the body's edification and life transformation. Where the Spirit reigns, there's order, service, humility, real growth.

Legitimate Desire and Sick Desire

Paul doesn't quench spiritual longing. In fact, he says: "Earnestly desire the higher gifts." The problem isn't desiring gifts but desiring them for wrong reasons. There's legitimate desire: to serve better, edify more, love more effectively. And there's sick desire: to stand out, belong to the "superior" group, silence insecurity with an experience.

This calls for an honest question: when someone says "I want that gift," what are they truly seeking? More capacity to help? Or more validation? The human heart is deceitful.[19] We can mix faith with a need for approval. That's why Paul doesn't just speak about gifts; he teaches the way of love. And he doesn't present it as a sentimental addendum but as the criterion that separates the spiritual from the merely noisy.

If 1 Corinthians 12 restores order, it also restores humility. No one can claim credit for what they've received. No one can belittle what another has received. No one can decree that a single manifestation is the definitive proof of

[19] (Jer 17:9)

the Spirit, because the Spirit Himself has taken care to distribute diversity.

The church that understands this breathes differently. It stops pressuring its members to produce signs and starts training them to serve. It stops measuring spirituality by intense moments and begins measuring it by constant faithfulness. It stops chasing religious applause and returns to the simple yet demanding question: Is the body of Christ being built up?

There, precisely there, the evidence begins to come into clearer focus. Not in the isolated brilliance of an experience, but in the transformed common life shaped by the Spirit who distributes, orders, and sustains.

1 Corinthians 13 and Love
as the Supreme Measure
CHAPTER 4
PST. FGB

In the debate about spiritual gifts, something revealing often happens: the chapters discussing visible manifestations are quickly cited, but the text Paul places at the center—like a hinge supporting all that precedes and ordering all that follows—is overlooked. That text is 1 Corinthians 13.

It's not a poetic pause for weddings or a sentimental interlude to soften the topic. It's the heart of the argument. If removed, 1 Corinthians 12 becomes a list of spiritual abilities and 1 Corinthians 14 a manual for operation. But with 1 Corinthians 13 in place, everything takes on a different light: the gifts are real, but they are not the ultimate criterion of spirituality. Love is.

And here arises a necessary, uncomfortable, and deeply pastoral question: If someone can speak in tongues, prophesy, or impress a congregation but does not love, what evidence are they truly displaying?

Love doesn't adorn gifts; it evaluates them.

Paul doesn't begin by saying, "Love, so your gifts will shine brighter." He says something stronger. He asserts that without love, the gift loses its spiritual value. It makes noise, creates an impact, but remains empty. The apostle chooses a simple yet harsh image: a clanging cymbal, a resounding gong. Much sound, little substance.

This confronts a widespread mindset: associating

the Spirit's presence with what's flashy. In some churches, if a person has an intense experience or a vocal manifestation, they're immediately considered "filled with the Spirit." Yet Paul reverses the emphasis: the proof isn't in the volume of the phenomenon but in the weight of character.

In pastoral practice, this is clear to see. There are believers who speak fluently about spiritual experiences but are incapable of asking for forgiveness at home. Others claim to have "power" in prayer but treat the weak brother harshly. Some feel authorized to correct everyone, yet their private life is a mess of resentment, envy, or lack of self-control. I'm not denying God can work even amid much immaturity. What I'm saying is that Paul doesn't let us confuse gifts with maturity, or manifestations with evidence.

A Necessary Contrast: Extraordinary Gifts, Indispensable Love.

Paul takes his argument to the extreme with phrases that leave no room for excuses. He mentions human and angelic tongues, prophecy, knowledge, faith that can move mountains, and even acts of radical surrender, like giving goods to the poor or surrendering the body to be burned. Then he repeats the same verdict: "But if I have not love, I am nothing," "it profits me nothing." Here Scripture slams the brakes on our impulse to measure spirituality by the extraordinary. It's as if Paul were saying: Even if you reached the pinnacle of charismatic expression, without

love, you're still bankrupt in what matters most.

Many sincere believers are surprised by this logic. They think, "How could someone do such things without being right with God?" But the New Testament, especially Paul, distinguishes between capabilities and spiritual conditions. God using someone in one area doesn't mean that person is walking in comprehensive obedience. A tool's functionality doesn't guarantee its cleanliness. A clear example of this comes from our Lord's own words: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"[20]

This shouldn't breed cynicism but sobriety. Instead of chasing a sign that elevates me before others, I need to ask whether the Spirit is forming Christ's life in me.

How do I treat my wife or husband when no one is watching? How do I react when contradicted? How do I manage my words when I'm tired? What do I do with my anger in traffic, my impatience in line, my thoughts when I'm alone?

[20] (Matt 7:21-23)

This is where love reveals its true weight.

The Definition of Love That Corrects Our Errors

The love (αγάπην) Paul describes isn't a warm feeling. It's persevering conduct. It's made of patience, kindness, absence of envy, humility, restraint from asserting oneself, purity of motive, resistance to irritation, willingness to forgive, rejection of delight in wrongdoing, and commitment to truth.

Notice the detail: this definition cuts through areas where a church can be sick while considering itself very "revived." Envy can infiltrate the worship team. Boasting can appear in the pulpit. Harshness can be justified as "zeal." A contentious spirit can disguise itself as "defending sound doctrine" without the meekness that same doctrine requires.

Sometimes I hear phrases like: "That's just how I am—confrontational—and the Spirit uses me." Yet Paul doesn't present love as an optional temperament but as the Spirit's standard. Love "is not irritable." This means the believer feels indignation toward sin and grief toward injustice but isn't overcome by explosive impulses, abrasiveness, or hurtful treatment. Love "keeps no record of wrongs." Simply put, it doesn't maintain a ledger to collect debts later.

Isn't this precisely what tests our daily spirituality?

Speaking in tongues can happen in a moment. Loving requires sustained character.

The Church Paul Corrected and the Church We Must Examine

Let's not forget the context. Corinth wasn't a gift-poor congregation. It was rich in manifestations. But it was also plagued by divisions, lawsuits, tolerated immorality, doctrinal pride, and abuse of the Lord's Supper. In that environment, gifts became status symbols, competition, and self-validation.

Paul doesn't respond by quenching spiritual life. He doesn't say, "Abandon the gifts and settle for a silent faith." Instead, he brings order to spirituality. He shows them that the most excellent way is not the way of display but the way of love. And love, in a church, is seen in very concrete things. This includes how the weak are cared for, how the sinner is disciplined, how the fallen are restored, how the voiceless are heard, and how worship time is managed to edify everyone—not just to give some a platform for expression.

It's impossible not to think of our current practices. What happens when a congregation considers a believer who doesn't speak in tongues "less spiritual"? What occurs when someone feels pressured to mimic an experience to gain acceptance? What takes root in a young person's heart when they learn their spiritual worth is measured by public

manifestations, but no one disciples them to overcome pornography, lying, or anger?

When love loses its central place, the community becomes a stage. And a stage can be full of emotion yet lack depth.

What Lasts and What Fades

Paul states that prophecies will cease, tongues will be stilled, and knowledge will pass away.[21] Beyond debates about timing or stages, the pastoral intent is clear: gifts, by their nature, belong to a temporary economy. They are tools for edification in this world. They serve a purpose but are not the ultimate end.

Love, however, remains. It remains not just because it is a virtue, but because it is part of God's character imparted to His people. God does not "use" love as an instrument. God is love. Therefore, the believer who grows in love is displaying deeper evidence than any momentary manifestation: they are being conformed to Christ.

This also liberates the faithful, ordinary believer who has never had an extraordinary, charismatic experience but walks in integrity. They may not have a dramatic story to tell, but they have a solid testimony: they are trustworthy,

[21] (1 Cor 13:8)

forgiving, serving, continually learning, refining their character, caring for their family, pursuing holiness, enduring trials without growing bitter. That kind of life rarely receives applause, but it is evidence heaven recognizes.

A Measure That Resists Pretense

There's something else worth saying honestly. External manifestations, precisely because they are visible, can be imitated. Sometimes through collective suggestion, sometimes through pressure, sometimes through a sincere desire to "fit in," and in some cases through manipulation. Love, on the other hand, resists falsification over time. It shows in the everyday.

A person may raise their hands and weep at an altar, and that may be genuine. But if they leave to belittle their spouse, scorn a brother, or mistreat their employees, the problem isn't that they "lack gifts"—it's that they lack heart formation. The Spirit doesn't just stir emotions. The Spirit sanctifies.

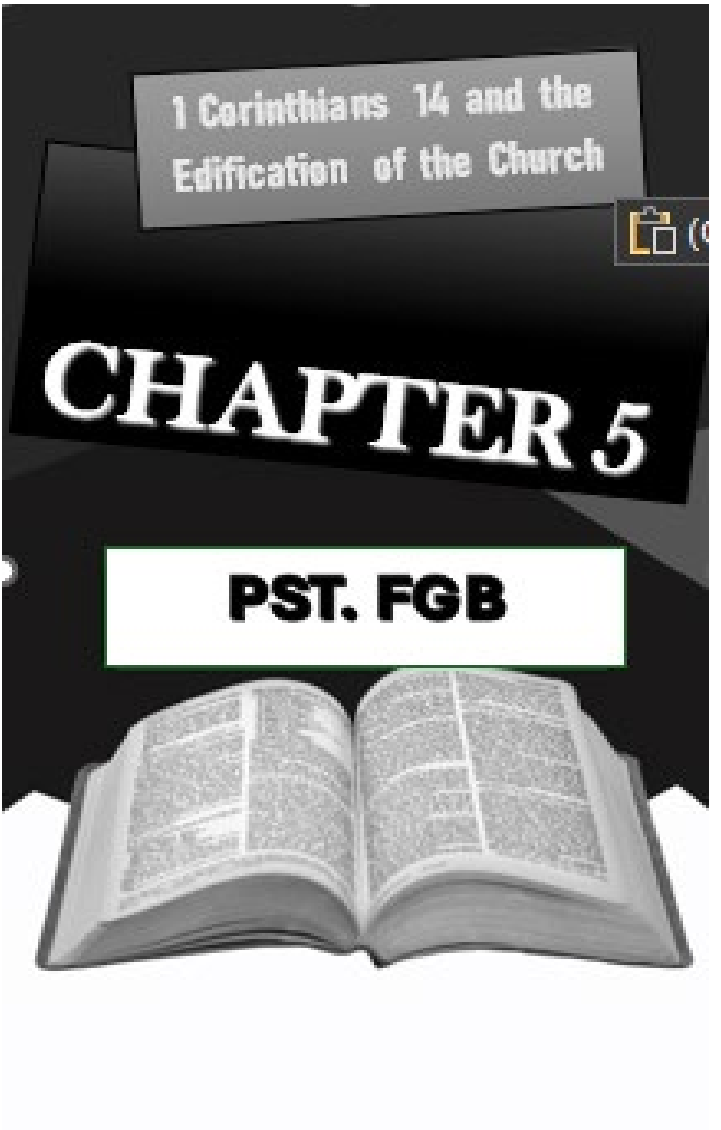
That's why chapter 13 isn't decorative text. It's an examination. It forces us to ask whether the evidence we're promoting produces believers more like Christ or merely more expressive in worship.

A Simple and Urgent Exhortation

If love is the supreme measure, then the filling of the Spirit cannot be reduced to a single sign. It must be seen in a life that learns to love when it's hard, to remain silent when appropriate, to speak truth without wounding for pleasure, to serve without seeking recognition.

The church needs less pressure to perform and more hunger to obey. Less obsession with the spectacular and more commitment to the steadfast. Because in the end, when everything else passes away, what will remain as evidence won't be the memory of an intense moment but the mark of a transformed life.

And that, though it may sound less exciting, is infinitely deeper.


1 Corinthians 14 and the
Edification of the Church
CHAPTER 5
PST. FGB

Paul doesn't write 1 Corinthians 14 to quench the Spirit but to correct a church that confused fervor with faithfulness. Corinth had gifts, yes, but also disorder. It had manifestations, but edification was scarce. And that contrast—as ancient as it is current—is where the conversation must turn serious.

The underlying question isn't whether God can grant tongues. The question is what God intends to accomplish when His Spirit moves in the midst of the congregation. Paul answers with one insistent word: edification. He repeats it, explains it, applies it. In doing so, he places an objective measure over our spiritual practices: Do they truly build up the body of Christ, or do they merely feed an individual experience?

The Priority Paul Establishes

The chapter opens with a clear tension: "Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy."[22] This isn't a decorative phrase. It follows the love hymn of 1 Corinthians 13, where the apostle established that love isn't an accessory for the Christian but their measure. Within that framework, Paul orders the church's desires. He doesn't forbid pursuing gifts. He situates them.

The reason appears immediately: the one who

[22] (1 Cor 14:1)

speaks in a tongue "does not speak to men but to God... no one understands him."[23] By contrast, the one who prophesies "speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation."[24] The comparison is direct. A practice can be intense yet useless to others. And if it's useless to others, it loses its primary purpose in public worship.

Here it's worth pausing to ask honestly: What do we consider "success" in a service? The volume of emotion, the duration of manifestations, the number of participants—or the real strengthening of faith, the understanding of Scripture, the comfort to the afflicted, and the correction of the wayward? Paul doesn't let the church answer with things that merely impress. He guides it toward what edifies.

The Contrast Between Private and Congregational

One of the most frequent problems is reading 1 Corinthians 14 as if Paul were attacking the gift itself. He isn't. In fact, he acknowledges that speaking in tongues can have personal value.

"The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself."[25] That point is important because it avoids caricatures. Not everything that benefits the individual is

[23] Ibid., 14:2
[24] (Ibid., 14:3)
[25] (Ibid., v.4)

harmful. But neither is everything that benefits the individual appropriate for dominating the church's gathering.

Paul places personal edification in its proper context. He doesn't scorn it, but he relativizes it in community settings. The assembled church isn't the space to impose my experience on others but to serve others with what they comprehend, receive, and apply. Put another way, authentic spirituality isn't measured solely by what I feel but by what I contribute to my brothers' and sisters' faith.

Many struggle to accept this because modern religious culture prizes what's visible. The spectacular creates the impression of "movement." But Paul isn't impressed by the spectacular. He asks whether the church understands, whether the church learns, whether the church is strengthened.

Intelligibility as an Act of Love

The apostle introduces a simple logic: if it isn't understood, it doesn't edify. He uses everyday examples: musical instruments that don't produce clear notes, a trumpet that sounds indistinct and fails to prepare anyone for battle. [26]The analogy is brilliant in its simplicity. Music without clarity can be noise. A trumpet without a defined

[26] (Ibid., vv. 7-8)

signal can be a hazard. Spiritual language without understanding can be empty.

Paul isn't promoting a cold or rationalistic faith. He's defending practical love. Because making myself understood is a concrete way to love others. And refusing to be understood—insisting on speaking in a way no one comprehends—can be a refined form of religious selfishness.

The Corinthian church had a problem of priorities. Paul expresses this with a striking phrase: "If I do not know the meaning of the utterance, I will be a foreigner to the speaker."[27] In a gathering where we are all brothers and sisters, how can it be right to create 'foreigners' through lack of understanding? Congregational worship isn't an exclusive club where some 'understand' and others merely observe.

Edification requires interpretation.

At the heart of the argument lies an often-overlooked instruction: "The one who speaks in an unknown tongue should pray for the ability to interpret it."[28] Paul doesn't treat interpretation as an optional detail but as the condition for what is said to be useful to the whole.

He then insists: "If I pray in an unknown tongue,

[27] (Ibid., v.11)
[28] (Ibid., v.13)

my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful."[29] The problem isn't that the spirit is engaged. The problem is that the mind remains barren. And a church that celebrates barrenness ends up confusing activity with fruit.

Here, a pastoral observation is warranted. I've seen sincere believers—with a genuine desire to please God—who end up exhausted because they were taught to seek external signs as if these were the ultimate thermometer of their relationship with the Spirit. Some feel 'less' because they don't experience what others do. Others feel 'more' and, unintentionally, develop spiritual pride. In both cases, edification weakens. The congregation doesn't grow in unity; it grows in comparisons.

Paul, however, declares: "What then? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also... I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also."[30] There's no war between the spiritual and the intelligible. Maturity integrates both.

Worship as a Space for Instruction and Testimony

Paul adds an evangelistic criterion that is often ignored. He says that if the whole church gathers and all speak in tongues, and "uninformed or unbelieving people

[29] (Ibid., v.14)
[30] Ibid., v.15

enter," they will say, "You are out of your minds."[31] The scene is clear. A visitor enters, hears a torrent of incomprehensible sounds, observes a dynamic they can't interpret, and concludes this isn't a message from God for them.

But if there is prophecy in the Pauline sense—intelligible words that apply God's truth to the heart—the visitor can be convicted, examined, confronted: "The secrets of his heart are disclosed."[32] The result isn't confusion but worship: "God is really among you."

This isn't about designing worship to please unbelievers. It's about avoiding turning worship into a private language that needlessly excludes. The gospel is already a stumbling block by its content. There's no need to add stumbling blocks through lack of order and clarity.

Isn't it significant that Paul connects God's real presence with understanding and repentance, not with the intensity of the moment? This challenges many modern practices. But it's biblical. The Spirit's presence isn't demonstrated by noise levels but by holy effect: conviction, humility, true worship, restoration.

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[31] (Ibid., v.23)
[32] (Ibid., vv.24-25)

"I Wish" and "More" Don't Mean "Normative."

Paul confesses: "I wish you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you prophesied."[33] He also says: "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you."[34] These phrases have been used to defend an almost exclusive emphasis on tongues. But the same text prevents that misuse.

Because Paul immediately adds: "Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue."[35] The comparison is intentionally disproportionate. Five versus ten thousand. The number isn't mathematical; it's pedagogical. Paul is reeducating the church's heart. He's saying: If I must choose between private impact and public benefit, I choose public benefit.

This is crucial for this book's theme. The apostle can value the gift without making it the normative evidence of the Spirit's filling. In fact, his primary emphasis isn't "how to prove you have the Spirit" but "how to love the church when you gather with her." And that shift in focus is exactly what many communities need to recover.

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[33] (Ibid., v.5)
[34] (Ibid., v.18)
[35] (Ibid., v.19)

Spiritual Maturity: Thinking Like Adults

Paul exhorts: "Brothers, do not be children in your thinking... in your thinking, be mature."[36] It's a loving yet firm correction. Spiritual immaturity sometimes disguises itself as spontaneity. Sometimes as 'freedom.' But Paul names it for what it is: childishness.

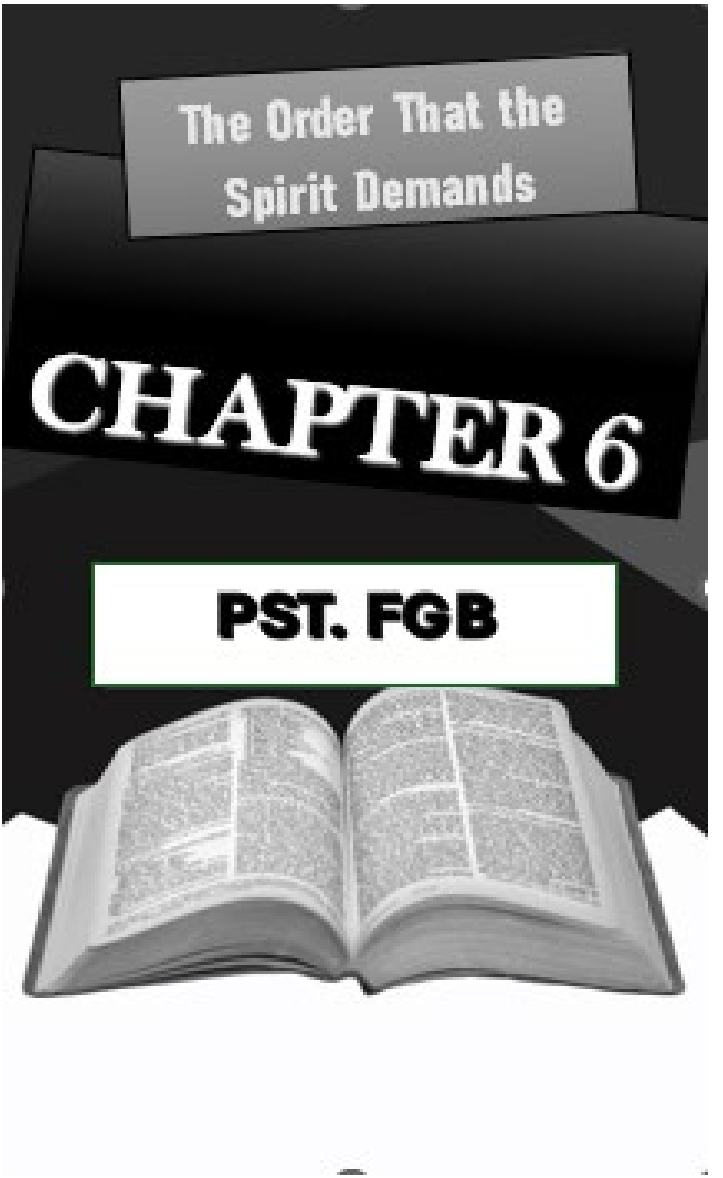
The maturity he seeks isn't about quenching the heart but ordering the mind and will to love better. It isn't restraining out of fear but guiding with wisdom. It's recognizing that a Christian gathering isn't the place to compete, show off, or overflow irresponsibly. This is the place to serve. Understanding this changes the questions we ask. Instead of "Did it feel powerful?", we begin asking "Was the truth made clear?", "Was someone comforted?", "Was there gracious exhortation?", "Was unity strengthened?", "Was Christ exalted with reverence?". That's the kind of evaluation 1 Corinthians 14 teaches us to make.

And when this criterion governs, it becomes evident that the filling of the Spirit cannot be reduced to a single audible manifestation. The Spirit edifies, orders, illuminates, corrects, comforts. His work is recognized in a church that understands, responds, and grows in holiness—not just in a church that experiences. Paul isn't debating minor details. He's safeguarding the health of Christ's body.

[36] (Ibid., v.20)

If edification is the compass, many practices will need reordering. And if it's difficult, it's worth asking why: Are we defending Scripture or defending a custom? Are we seeking the Spirit or seeking confirmation of a model that makes us feel secure?

The evidence of the Spirit, when biblical, doesn't leave the church in noise. It leads to clarity that transforms.


The Order That the Spirit Demands
CHAPTER 6
PST. FGB

There's an idea repeated far too often: if the Spirit manifests, everything else must yield. As if disorder were a sign of authenticity. As if volume, simultaneity, and impulse were enough to certify divine presence. Yet Paul doesn't share that assumption. On the contrary, when addressing tongues in the congregation, he gives concrete, measurable instructions—uncomfortably clear to some. This isn't about quenching the fire. It's about recognizing that the Spirit who ignites also governs.

The scene in Corinth wasn't an example of mature freedom but of spiritual immaturity with charismatic vocabulary. There were gifts, yes. There was fervor, too. But something essential was missing: love that edifies and order that protects the church. That's why Paul doesn't just say "use wisdom." He specifies details that only become necessary when the problem is real. Number, turn, interpretation, silence when appropriate. All this belongs to 1 Corinthians 14, and it's precisely what many contemporary practices overlook.

"If any speak in an unknown tongue, let there be only two or at most three."[37] This isn't poetic. It's a limit. Paul doesn't propose a flexible suggestion but a guideline for public worship. Two, or at most three. Not ten. Not "all at once." Not a prolonged atmosphere where the entire

[37] (1 Cor 14:27)

congregation surrenders to a chain of uninterpreted sounds. The apostle knows the church's gathering isn't a private space for spiritual catharsis but a communal act where the other's good outweighs personal satisfaction.

Why a numerical limit? Because the gathering has a purpose: to edify. Time is finite. Attention is too. And the visitor or weak believer cannot be sacrificed on the altar of exuberance. If a church allows tongues to dominate the meeting without restraint, the practical message is clear: what's most valued here isn't what's understood but what impresses. Paul reverses that logic. What's valuable is what edifies with clarity.

He then adds another requirement seldom respected when the gift becomes an identity symbol: "and in turn." Not simultaneous, not in chorus, not overlapping. "In turn" means each intervention acknowledges the other's presence and submits to a shared order. The speaker waits. The one who waits demonstrates self-control. The community learns that spirituality isn't about overpowering but serving.

This detail is revealing and profound: the Spirit doesn't override will or discipline. He doesn't seize a person like an uncontrolled instrument. Thus, in the same passage (1 Cor. 14:27), Paul states that "the spirits of

prophets are subject to prophets."[38] In other words, the person isn't trapped by an irresistible force. They can be silent. They can wait. They can obey. Whoever insists they couldn't stop—without realizing it—describes an experience Paul doesn't attribute to the Holy Spirit.

To this he adds a condition that should shut the door on many common scenes: "and let someone interpret." Interpretation isn't a minor detail. It's the hinge that turns an unintelligible expression into edification for the church. Without interpretation, the church receives no instruction, no clear comfort, no correction, no direction—only audible presence. Paul is emphatic: without interpretation, tongues don't fulfill their communal function.

Here, a simple question is warranted: What happens in practice when there's no interpreter? In many places, nothing. It continues as usual. It's celebrated as usual. The emotion produced is assumed to be sufficient evidence God is at work. But Paul doesn't argue from emotion but from purpose. If there's no interpretation, the result is that "you speak into the air." And if you speak into the air, the body isn't built up.

The final command is hardest for a culture that confuses intensity with spirituality: "If there is no

[38] (Ibid., v.32)

interpreter, let him keep silent in church." Be silent. Not "speak softly," not "continue in your spirit," not "remain in the flow." Be silent. And yet Paul neither humiliates nor despises the one who possesses the gift. He adds a pastoral alternative: "and let him speak to himself and to God." There is room for personal expression, but not at the expense of public edification.

This demonstrates balance. Paul recognizes that the gift may have a legitimate use in one's devotional life. He isn't forbidding someone from praying in tongues privately. He is regulating congregational worship. Because the gathering is not the place for each person to do what edifies themselves, but what edifies everyone. That distinction, simple as it is, is often the one that provokes the most resistance.

Think of an everyday example. If at a family gathering everyone talks at the same time, no one listens, no one understands, and in the end all that remains is exhaustion. Now imagine someone defending that dynamic by saying, "That's just who we are; that's how love feels." Love, in reality, is shown by listening, yielding one's turn, seeking clarity for the common good. Paul applies that spiritual common sense to the church. Order is not coldness. Order is practical love.

It is also important to note that Paul does not treat

order as a merely organizational matter, but a theological one. "For God is not a God of confusion but of peace."[39] That places the issue on a more serious level. When a congregation normalizes chaos as a mark of spirituality, it doesn't merely adopt a style; it ends up communicating a distorted image of God. Peace here is not the absence of emotion. It is a quality of God's rule in the midst of his people. A worship service can be fervent and, at the same time, sober. There can be joy and also understanding. There can be tears and still be order.

Some fear that these limits will "quench" the Spirit's moving. Paul uses another verb: "Seek edification." It is an active pursuit. And in order to achieve it, the Spirit inspires both the gift and the regulation of the gift. A mature church does not choose between power and order. It unites both. Power without order becomes spectacle. Order without life becomes formalism. Paul fights against both extremes, but here he is aiming at the tendency to justify anything in the name of the spiritual.

In years of church life, one sees patterns repeat themselves. A new believer comes to faith, hears that the definitive evidence of the filling of the Spirit is speaking in tongues, and is pressured—sometimes with good intentions—to "receive it" in a single meeting. If they succeed, it is celebrated as proof. If not, their commitment,

[39] (Ibid., v.33)

their faith, or their salvation is called into question.

In that context, gatherings tend to favor the kind of atmosphere where "something" happens, even if it is not understood. And when the desired result is a visible sign, biblical limits feel like obstacles.

But Paul leaves no room for the church to turn the gift into a test. His pastoral concern is another: that everything be done "decently and in order."[40] He does not speak like a cold administrator, but like an apostle who knows the damage caused by lack of control. A congregation without order becomes unsafe for the weak, confusing for newcomers, and tempting for the proud. There, those who want to draw attention to themselves flourish, while those who seek to learn quietly are silenced.

There is an additional detail that often goes unnoticed: these rules assume leadership and discernment. "An interpreter" implies that the church identifies who interprets and confirms that what is interpreted makes sense. "In turn" implies that someone maintains order. "Be silent... if there is no interpreter" implies that the congregation does not feel guilty about stopping an intervention that does not edify. In other words, order does not appear on its own. It is cultivated. And it is cultivated with pastoral courage. This is where many leaders feel the greatest pressure. They fear correcting because they do not

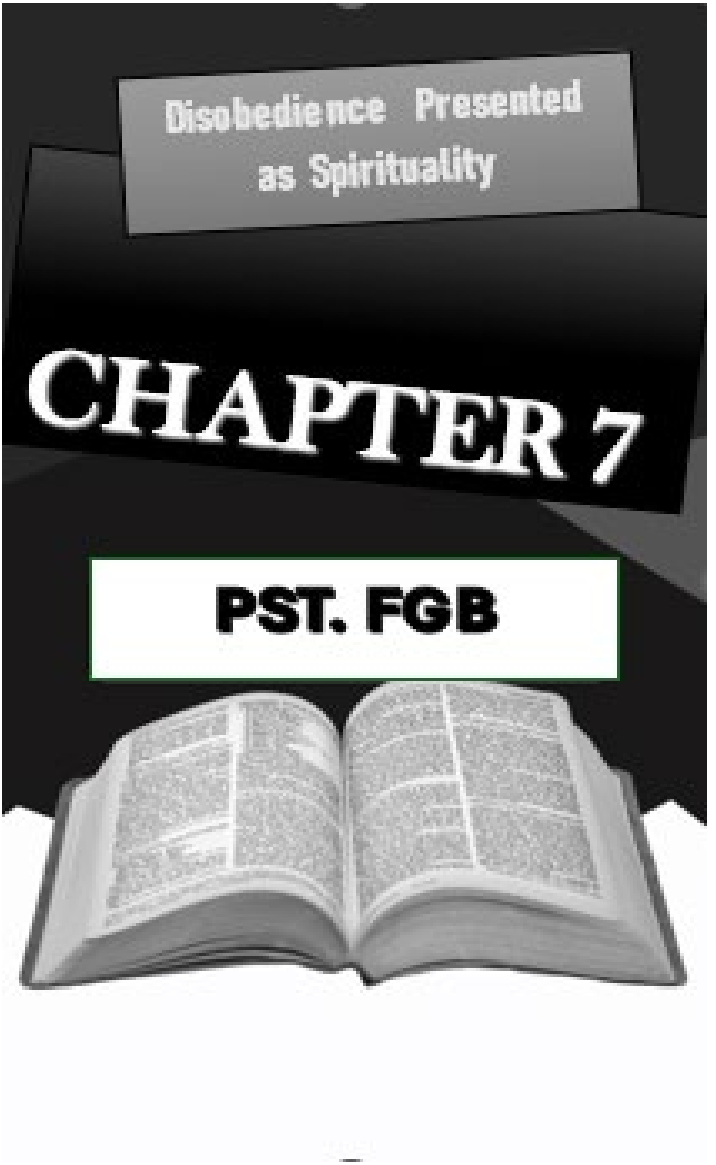
[40] (Ibid., v.40)

want to be labeled as people who "quench" the Spirit. Yet allowing disorder out of fear of criticism is also a form of negligence. The question that should carry weight is not what the loudest people will say, but what Scripture requires and what edifies the flock. When Paul establishes limits, he is not reducing the Spirit's work to a human manual. He is protecting the Spirit's purpose in the church. The Spirit distributes gifts for the common good. If the common good is lost, the use of the gift, even if genuine, becomes misplaced. And if the gift is used out of place again and again, the church ends up training itself in a spirituality that confuses impulse with obedience.

In the end, the order Paul demands is not a liturgical formality. It is an expression of God's character and a manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit in community life. Patience to wait one's turn. Gentleness to refrain from imposing oneself. Self-control to remain silent when appropriate. Love to prefer another's edification over my own experience. If these things are not present, the noise may be great, but the evidence of the Spirit is small.

The challenge is no small one. It requires unlearning habits, adjusting practices, having honest conversations, and correcting with tenderness. But the alternative is worse: building churches where disorder is celebrated as virtue and obedience is viewed with suspicion as coldness. Paul does not allow that exchange. The church can be alive without being chaotic, and fervent without being

confused. This balance, far from quenching the Spirit, honors His work.


Disobedience Presented
as Spirituality
CHAPTER 7
PST. FGB

There is a form of disobedience that is especially dangerous because it disguises itself as virtue. It does not present itself as rebellion, but as zeal. It is not announced as rejection of Scripture, but as "freedom of the Spirit." In the language of many churches, this disobedience even receives applause: it is celebrated as revival, interpreted as "anointing," and defended as a sign that God is at work.

The problem is not emotion. The problem is when emotion becomes an argument against apostolic instruction.

Paul did not write his instructions to the Corinthians as an optional recommendation for sophisticated congregations. He wrote them because the church was confusing power with noise, fervor with disorder, manifestation with edification. And the apostle, with pastoral patience and spiritual authority, set clear limits. Not to quench the Spirit, but so that the church would learn to recognize Him.

The irony is hard to ignore: in the name of the Spirit, the very instructions the Spirit inspired are ignored.

When disorder is called "freedom." In many contemporary congregations, the scene is familiar. Someone starts a song. Within minutes, the volume rises.

The music continues. Some begin speaking in tongues simultaneously. Others shout random phrases. Some fall, others run. In certain cases, the microphone is passed around, and each intervention is claimed to be "a move of the Spirit."

If someone asks why there is no interpretation, the answer is usually swift: "God is ministering; don't limit Him." If someone reminds them that Paul asked for order, they are labeled "religious." If a new believer is confused or frightened, they are told "it's normal," that they "don't understand yet."

The honest question is unavoidable: Since when did disobeying the apostle Paul become evidence of spirituality?

The point is not to deny that God can touch a person in a moment of intense worship. God is sovereign and merciful. The point is to recognize that God's sovereignty does not cancel the church's responsibility. God's presence is not measured by the level of chaos, but by faithfulness to God's character. And God's character, according to the same letter, is reflected in peace, edification, clarity, and order.

Paul did not say: "If you feel intense emotion, set aside the rules." He said, in essence: "If the Spirit is at work,

it will also be evident in the order." Because the Spirit does not compete with the truth He Himself revealed.

Confusion as a permanent atmosphere: A congregation can grow so accustomed to confusion that it ends up considering it normal. Through repetition, the pattern becomes identity. Members no longer distinguish between what is biblical and what is custom. The visitor who asks questions seems "cold." The leader who suggests adjustments becomes "the enemy."

Yet Paul offers a simple and decisive test: communal effect. A gift that does not edify fails its purpose. A practice that does not communicate clearly does not serve the body. What leaves the congregation without understanding is not a sign of maturity, but of immaturity.

Here, a pastoral detail often overlooked emerges. Paul is concerned about the unbeliever and the uninformed, about the one who enters and observes. He does not organize worship to impress, but to edify. And this concern is not pragmatism; it is love. It is the same logic of 1 Corinthians 13 applied to 1 Corinthians 14. If love seeks the other's good, then a "spiritual experience" that confuses or excludes others can hardly be presented as superior.

Consider a simple example. If someone stands in a meeting and speaks for twenty seconds in a language no one understands, then sits down without interpretation, what has

been left behind? A personal moment. Perhaps sincere, perhaps intense. But personal. If this practice multiplies and becomes simultaneous, the result is not collective edification, but collective isolation. Each in their own spiritual bubble, all together, but not united. The church is not a chorus of spiritual monologues. It is a body that understands, exhorts, and comforts with comprehensible words.

The emotional argument and biblical authority: There is a recurring defense worth addressing. It is said: "But it feels real." And it may be true that it feels real. Religious emotion is not necessarily feigned. A person may genuinely weep, genuinely tremble, experience an authentic emotional release. The body responds. The mind focuses. The music intensifies. The communal suggestion spreads. Faith is also activated.

None of this, by itself, proves that a disobedient practice is correct. Scripture does not ask us to distrust all experience; it asks us to submit it. And to submit it does not mean to despise it, but to test it. When the final criterion becomes "what was felt," Christianity ends up governed by emotions.

And emotions, though they can accompany God's work, can also accompany error. Mature faith is not guided by the emotional highs of the moment, but by sustained

obedience. It is easier to raise one's voice than to control the tongue. It is simpler to run down the aisle than to ask for forgiveness at home. It is more appealing to talk about "fire" than to practice self-control. And yet, it is precisely these latter things that the New Testament presents as solid evidence of spiritual life.

If someone responds by saying, "That is quenching the Spirit," it is wise to calmly reply: quenching the Spirit would mean resisting the truth, ignoring love, despising holiness, and calling "anointing" what Paul calls disorder. The Spirit does not need us to defend Him with disobedience.

Leadership and the temptation of spectacle: Here the issue becomes more serious, because it is no longer just about spontaneous practices. It is about pastoral decisions. There are sincere leaders who inherited a model and never questioned it. Others uphold it because they fear that if they establish order, people will leave. Then there are those who have discovered that spectacle attracts. An "intense" service builds a reputation. A video with shouts and manifestations gets shared more than a sober sermon. Noise can become strategy, even if no one admits it. The problem is that the church is not built to produce moments, but to make disciples. A leader may measure success by the level of Sunday euphoria while simultaneously ignoring that their congregation lives in gossip, divisions, hidden immorality, or prolonged resentment. They can celebrate a "night of

tongues" and, in the same week, realize that two sisters cannot stand each other. What kind of evidence is that?

In his insistence on order, Paul is protecting the church from a trap: confusing intensity with spirituality. Because intensity is easy to manufacture. Character is not.

A pastoral observation helps ground this. In counseling, I have heard testimonies from people who could "manifest" easily in worship but could not control their anger at home. They spoke in tongues publicly but humiliated their spouse privately. They were moved by music but did not know how to ask for forgiveness. And the saddest part is that some were convinced they were right with God because they had a repeatable experience. The doctrine that presents a charismatic sign as normative evidence fuels this self-deception. And that self-deception becomes a refuge: "I have the Spirit because I speak in tongues," even if my life contradicts the fruit.

Disobedience that becomes culture: When an unbiblical practice is repeated without correction, it ceases to be an event and becomes culture. It is taught without being spoken. Newcomers quickly learn what is celebrated and what is scorned. If the church applauds the noisy and ignores the godly, the message is clear.

In that environment, Paul's exhortation is perceived

as a threat. And that is a symptom: when the Bible threatens a congregation's identity, the congregation needs reform, not excuses.

This is not an attack on individuals. Many sincerely love Christ and have grown up in that context. The point is to protect the church from cumulative harm. Because sustained disorder produces other disorders: rivalries over "who is more anointed," emotional dependence on the service, doctrinal superficiality, and a tendency to dismiss biblical correction as lack of faith.

Scripture, however, presents a humbler path: "Let all things be done decently and in order.".[41] That phrase does not sound spectacular, but it is deeply spiritual. Order is not the absence of life; it is the presence of governance. And the Holy Spirit does not only ignite—He also directs.

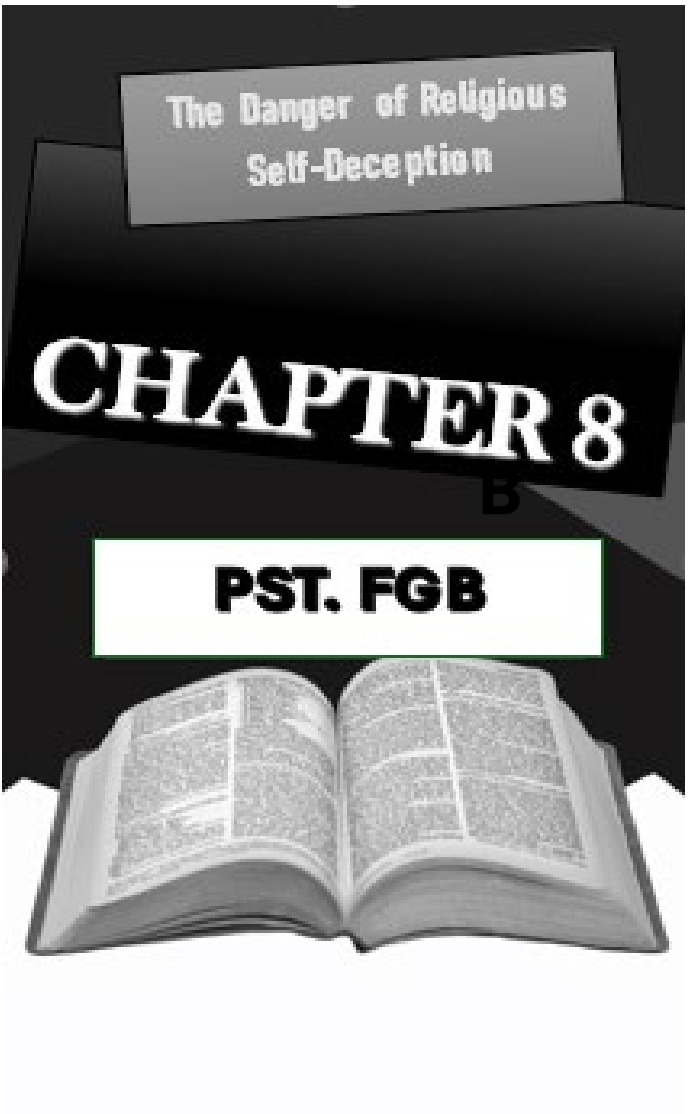
A revealing question: It is helpful to ask a simple question, without sarcasm, in all honesty: if Paul visited many of our gatherings today, would he say he is seeing obedience or the repetition of Corinth? We do not need to imagine this with morbid curiosity, but with the fear of God. Because the goal is not to win a debate about tongues, but to honor Christ in His church. And honoring Him means obeying His Word even when it goes against what we have always done.

[41] (1 Cor 14:40)

The solution is not to swing to the opposite extreme, where all charismatic expressions are prohibited out of fear. Paul did not do that. He regulated, ordered, prioritized edification, and subjected manifestation to understanding. This is a more demanding path than outright prohibition, because it requires constant discernment and responsible leadership.

When disobedience is presented as spirituality, the church loses its compass. And when the compass is lost, emotion takes the place of truth. That is why this issue is not secondary.

What is at stake is not a style of worship, but the ability to recognize the true evidence of the Spirit. That evidence, as we will see more clearly later, is not shouted to be noticed. It is lived until it becomes undeniable.


The Danger of Religious Self-Deception
CHAPTER 8
PST. FGB

There is a silent trap that easily takes root in the life of the church: confusing intensity with truth. It does not happen overnight. First, it becomes normal to measure God's presence by the emotional temperature of the service. Then, without realizing it, we begin to assume that if someone wept, trembled, or spoke in tongues, then they were filled with the Spirit. And later—most troubling of all—we conclude that whoever did not have that experience might be "cold," "quenched," or even far from God.

This way of thinking is dangerous, not because it scorns emotions (since the gospel also touches the heart), but because it can produce a very convincing religious self-deception. The person believes they are right with God because they had an intense moment, while their daily life remains untransformed. And religious self-deception has a particular mark: it defends itself fervently but avoids being examined honestly.

Scripture insists on something we sometimes prefer to forget: one can be sincerely mistaken.[42] Sincerity does not turn error into truth. A worship service can be intense and yet disorderly. An experience can be real and yet misinterpreted. And the most uncomfortable truth: an experience can be psychological, contagious, or even prompted by communal pressure, and the person may

[42] (Prov 14:12)

attribute it to God without ill intent. Who wants to admit they confused emotion with spiritual evidence?

In pastoral practice, self-deception appears with a human face. I remember conversations with people who spoke with absolute certainty about their "fullness" because at some point they manifested a sign the group celebrated. Yet when speaking of their home, there was verbal violence. When speaking of their work, there were small normalized deceptions. When speaking of their relationships, there was accumulated resentment. When confronted gently, they responded with a learned phrase: "But I know what I received." That phrase, repeated as a shield, closed the door to any serious examination.

The problem is not that someone defends an experience, but that they use that experience as a substitute for obedience. Paul never treated spiritual manifestations as credentials of maturity. On the contrary, he had to correct a church that was rich in gifts but poor in character. The Corinthians were not an example of balance.

They had manifestations, yes, but also divisions, quarrels, tolerated immorality, and a superficial way of evaluating spirituality. And here lies an uncomfortable lesson: it is possible to have charismatic activity and, at the same time, be in fragile spiritual condition. Such was the case of the forerunner of Pentecostalism and modern

glossolalia, Charles F. Parham, whose cases of sexual misconduct would haunt him until his death and even led many of his closest allies to reject his leadership, contributing to the decline of his popularity and influence.[43]

Self-deception is also fueled by the need to belong. If a community establishes, explicitly or implicitly, that a certain phenomenon is the mark of the "truly spiritual," many will feel pressure to conform. In some places, this pressure is overt: they pray for the person until they "receive the sign." In others, it is subtler: the most applauded testimonies are those of extraordinary experiences, and quiet conversions seem second-rate. In that environment, people learn what is expected of them. And when the desire for acceptance combines with high emotional intensity, no malice is needed to fall into unconscious imitation.

This is not meant to ridicule anyone. That would be unjust and cruel. What it does demand is honesty. If the Holy Spirit produces self-control, how do we justify practices where the person loses all control and it is celebrated as the pinnacle of spirituality? If the Spirit edifies, why is what confuses, distracts, or fractures the congregation normalized? If the Spirit guides into truth, why is a norm Paul never presented as universal taught with such certainty?

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[43] (Arthur J. Clement, Pentecostals and Charismatics, A Confessional Lutheran Evaluation, p.43)

Religious self-deception grows denser when three things mix: misguided doctrine, a culture of spectacle, and a lack of accountability. Misguided doctrine turns an experience into a seal of approval. The culture of spectacle makes the flashy the most sought-after. And the lack of accountability allows someone to consider themselves "full" without anyone asking about their character, humility, purity, treatment of family, or integrity with money.

Sometimes, self-deception is sustained by comparisons. "I feel more than others," "I pray louder," "I have more manifestations." But the gospel never called us to compare intensities. It called us to take up the cross, forgive the enemy, speak the truth, live in holiness when no one is watching. These things do not usually produce applause, but they do produce Christlikeness. And there, a harder-to-falsify evidence is displayed.

Another common form of self-deception is reducing the Christian life to moments. Moments of anointing, moments of fire, moments of brokenness. They are real and can be valuable, but they are not the center. The Christian life is a journey, not an occasional emotional release. That is why the decisive question is not "What did you feel that day?" but "What is happening to your character today?" Because fruit is evaluated over time. No one judges a tree by a gust of wind, but by what it produces season after season.

There is also a more sophisticated self-deception: that of those who learn the right spiritual language to avoid confrontation. They know how to quote Scripture, they know when to say "glory to God," they know how to describe "the presence" with words that sound profound. Yet when asked to reconcile, ask for forgiveness, or submit to biblical correction, they become evasive or aggressive. This kind of verbal spirituality is especially dangerous because it mimics maturity without cost. But true maturity always costs something: pride, comfort, reputation, control.

Here it is good to recall a simple warning from the Lord: a tree is known by its fruit.[44] He did not say "by its intensity," nor "by its volume," nor "by its manifestation." He said "fruit." And fruit, by definition, is visible and practical evidence.

If someone claims to be filled with the Spirit, yet their life is marked by constant quarrels, manipulation, double standards, or lack of mercy, something does not add up. And when something does not add up, the most loving response is not silence to avoid conflict, but clarity to prevent ruin.

This self-deception does not only affect the individual believer. It affects the health of the entire church. When a congregation adopts a particular manifestation as

[44] (Matt 7:20)

the measure of spirituality, two inevitable groups emerge: the "advanced" and the "lagging." Those who "have already received" and those who "have not yet." And this division breeds pride in some and shame in others. Instead of making disciples, it creates categories. Instead of shepherding consciences, it administers experiences. Instead of growing in love, it competes for signs.

I have seen the tangible harm in sincere people who love Christ but live with guilt because they have not had the experience their community considers mandatory. They pray, serve, fight against sin, persevere. Yet they feel "incomplete." This guilt does not come from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit convicts of sin to lead to repentance and faith, not to impose an external mark as a passport of acceptance. When a doctrine turns God's children into permanent suspects, something has gone awry.

The solution is not to swing to the opposite extreme and scorn all spiritual experience. That, too, would be a form of pride. The solution is to return to the biblical standard. The Holy Spirit did not come to entertain the church, but to sanctify, comfort, guide, and empower it to bear witness to Christ. And if something occupies the center that only Christ should occupy, no matter how spiritual it sounds, it needs reordering.

It is worth asking simple but probing questions. Is

this person more humble than before? More patient at home, where there is no audience? Has she learned to control her tongue when angry? Has she grown in generosity without announcing it? Does she seek reconciliation or always win arguments? Does she receive correction or take offense easily? These questions do not quench the Spirit. On the contrary, they honor Him, because they recognize His purpose: to form Christ in us.

Religious self-deception thrives where there is no examination. And biblical examination is not persecution; it is pastoral care. Just as a doctor does not hate the patient for requesting clinical tests, the church does not hate the believer for calling for serious evaluation. The opposite is negligence. If we truly believe there are doctrines that can lull the conscience, then clarity is not a luxury—it is an act of love. The apostle Paul urged the Corinthians to "examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith."[45]

In the end, the most reliable evidence is not what can be produced in a meeting with music and expectation, but what holds up on Monday morning. There, in the everyday, it becomes clear whether the Spirit governs or whether there was only an emotional moment. There it is revealed whether faith is real dependence or mere religious habit. And there, too, hope emerges: God does not call us to live by appearances, but by truth. Truth may hurt at first, but afterward it liberates, orders, and brings peace.

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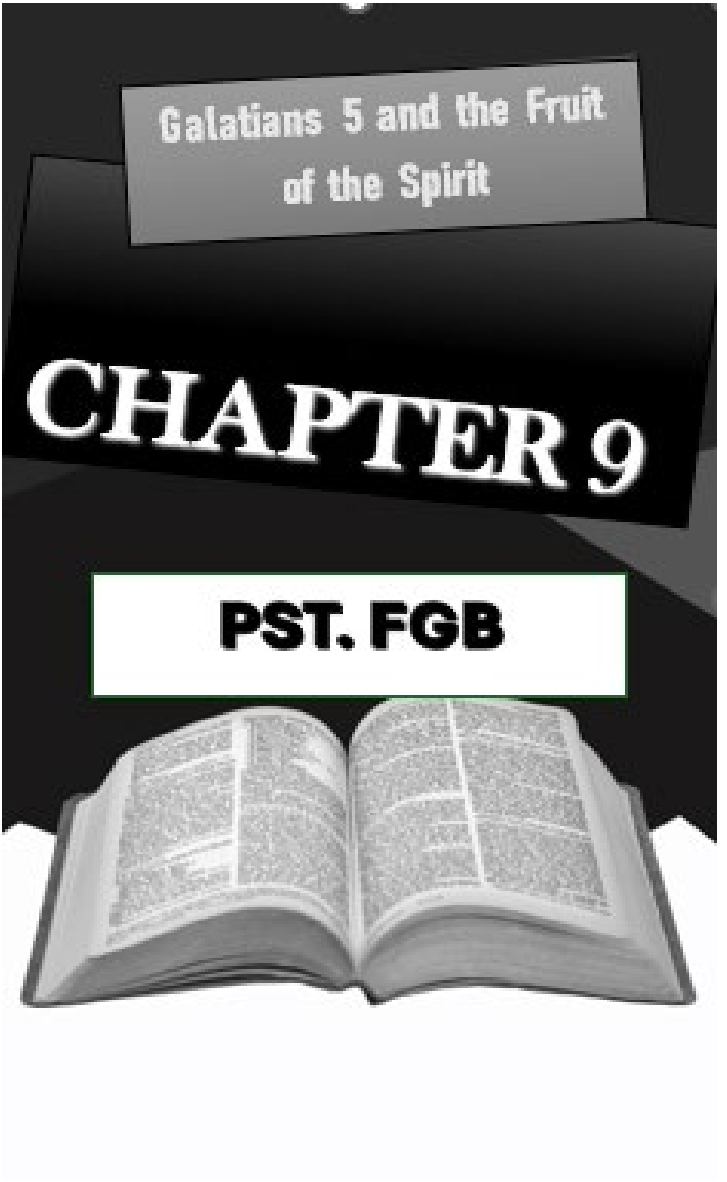
[45] (2 Cor 13:5)

The Holy Spirit does not need us to defend Him with exaggerations. He needs us to obey Him faithfully. And when obedience becomes the center, self-deception loses its power. Because the light of the Word, applied with humility, has an inevitable effect: it exposes the false and strengthens the genuine. This is a deeper work, less spectacular, but infinitely more secure.


Galatians 5 and the Fruit of the Spirit
CHAPTER 9
PST. FGB

The letter to the Galatians has an urgent tone. Paul does not write as one clarifying a minor detail, but as a pastor watching his spiritual children walk toward a cliff. In that church, an alternate "gospel" was being accepted—one that seemed more serious because it was stricter, but in reality ended up enslaving. And it is in this context, not in a retreat of intense experiences or a gathering of flashy manifestations, that the apostle places one of the most direct tests of the Spirit's work: the fruit.

Paul does not introduce the fruit of the Spirit as a devotional ornament. He presents it as concrete evidence of true freedom. "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."[46] The flesh, in his language, is not merely the sexual or the crude. It is the self as center, human impulse without God's governance, even when disguised as religion. That is why the contrast is so stark. Paul does not oppose "flesh" to "miracles," nor "flesh" to "tongues," but "flesh" to "life led by the Spirit." And that life is recognized by its fruit.

There is a detail that is often overlooked. Paul speaks of "fruit" in the singular. He does not say "fruits" as if they were separate pieces one could choose according to temperament. He speaks of an integral reality, like a cluster that grows together. Certainly, there may be areas more advanced and others more immature, but the point is that

[46] (Gal 5:16)

the Spirit produces a coherent character, not a spiritual collage. If a person boasts of being "filled," yet their life is dominated by anger, rivalry, or lack of self-control, the problem is not a lack of experience; it is that their "evidence" is misdefined.

The fruit is not makeup; it is new life: Before listing the fruit, Paul lists the "works of the flesh."[47] He does this not to create morbid curiosity, but to provide a diagnostic tool. And the list includes things that shock and things that are easily tolerated in religious environments: enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, rivalries, dissensions, heresies, envy. Many churches that consider themselves "very spiritual" would not permit open immorality in the pulpit, yet they coexist with permanent divisions, factions, leaders who govern by pressure, and members who feed on conflict. Paul places it all on the same table. And then he warns with a seriousness that brooks no games: "Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is not presented as a set of pleasant emotions, but as the character of Christ formed in a real person, with real responsibilities. The Spirit does not come to intensify our reactions; He comes to reorder our affections, our words, our decisions, and our relationships.

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[47] (Ibid., 5:19-21)

Love: the evidence that is hardest to counterfeit Paul places love first because it is the root of the rest. It is not sentimental love, but an active disposition to seek the good of the other. Love is evident when no one is applauding. It is evident in how a brother is corrected, in how the pastor is spoken of in his absence, in how a spouse is treated after the service, in how someone who thinks differently is listened to.

I have seen people weep during worship and, minutes later, humiliate a server for a minor mistake. That contrast is not "strong character"; it is an alarm. The Spirit's love is not limited to moments of heightened emotion. It endures under pressure, fatigue, and disagreement.

Joy: inner stability, not occasional euphoria Biblical joy does not depend on the service going well. It does not require perfect music or a favorable atmosphere. It is a joy rooted in what God has done, in what God promises, and in who God is. That is why it can coexist with tears. When joy is merely euphoria, it becomes fragile: if it is not "felt," it is assumed God is absent. But the Spirit's joy can accompany a mother praying for a rebellious child, a believer facing illness, or a young person choosing to obey even if they stand alone. It is not an emotional peak; it is a quiet strength.

Peace: the end of inner war and war with others

The Spirit's peace is not indifference. It is rest in God's sovereignty and a reconciling attitude. It is evident in how one argues. Some "defend doctrine" as if in a street fight. In the name of truth, they destroy people. Peace does not eliminate convictions, but it changes the tone, the goal, and the method.

It is also evident in private life. A person may claim to be "filled" and yet live dominated by anxiety, suspicion, and control. Sometimes this restlessness disguises itself as "discernment." But the Spirit guides; He does not torment.

Patience: time as a tool of holiness
Patience is one of the least celebrated virtues because it is not spectacular. It is the ability to endure without exploding, to wait without manipulating, to persevere without abandoning. Patience is tested in traffic, at work, in parenting, and also in the church, when processes do not move at the speed one desires.

An impatient leader often justifies their outbursts as "holy zeal." But zeal without patience is often pride with a Bible in hand. The Spirit produces firmness without violence.

Kindness and goodness: the weight of character in everyday life. Kindness is gentle treatment, a willingness to

lighten burdens, real sensitivity. Goodness is active integrity, doing what is right even when it costs. Both virtues ground spirituality in simple actions: how one welcomes a newcomer, how one responds to a message, how one handles conflict without destroying the other.

Nothing is more contradictory than a church that boasts of "anointing" yet is harsh with the weak, cold toward visitors, and cruel to those who fail. The Spirit's kindness is not naivety; it reflects the Father, who is good even to the ungrateful.

Faith: trustworthiness and faithfulness. In Galatians 5, "faith" can be understood as trust in God, but also as faithfulness—a life worthy of trust. Both go together. Faith that is expressed only in songs but not in decisions is incomplete faith. The Spirit's faithfulness is seen in keeping one's word, in work ethics, in financial stewardship, in steadfastness in prayer, even when no one is watching.

Many ministerial stumbles begin not from lack of talent, but from unfaithfulness in small things. The Spirit doesn't just inspire; He sustains.

Gentleness: strength under control
Gentleness is not timidity or weakness. It is power governed. It is the ability to correct without crushing and to be firm without cruelty. It is an indispensable virtue for anyone in authority, from parent to pastor.

Gentleness is an uncomfortable test because it exposes harshness. Some confuse authority with intimidation. But the Spirit doesn't produce religious tyrants. He produces servants with backbone and heart.

Self-control: the silent miracle

Paul concludes with self-control because it touches the core of discipleship: who governs. Without self-control, any gift becomes dangerous, any emotion rules, any impulse decides. Self-control manifests in concrete areas: speech, appetites, sexuality, time, money, social media, reactions. It's not about instant perfection, but a clear direction.

On more than one occasion, I've heard believers justify disorderly behavior by saying: "That's how the Spirit moved." Yet Paul teaches that "the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets."[48] The Spirit does not nullify responsibility; He strengthens it. Where the Spirit governs, a person does not lose control but regains it.

"Against such things there is no law."

After listing these, Paul makes a statement that seems simple yet profound: "Against such things there is no law."[49] No one needs to prohibit love, restrict patience, or regulate kindness. They cause no harm. They build up.

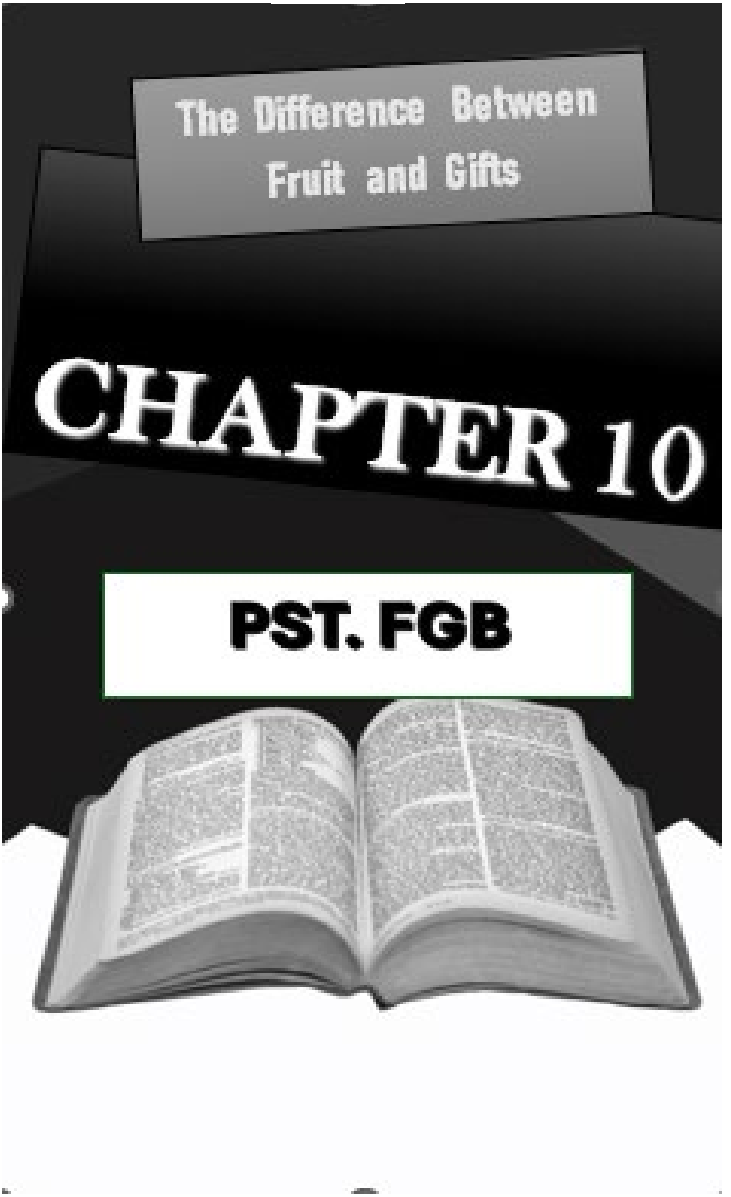
[48] (1 Cor 14:32)
[49] (Gal 5:23)

They heal. They unify. And this carries a clear pastoral implication: if a spirituality requires constant excuses to justify its disorder or harshness, it hardly originates from the Holy Spirit.

Paul concludes with a decisive statement: "Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."[50] To speak of crucifixion is not to speak of slight improvement but of radical rupture. The fruit of the Spirit is not a veneer over the flesh; it is new life that learns to say "no" to what once ruled.

The inevitable question is simple yet uncomfortable: when someone claims to be filled with the Spirit, what becomes most evident? A momentary manifestation or transformed character? An intense experience or a life that learns to love, control the tongue, pursue peace, and remain faithful? The Holy Spirit did not come to give us a badge to display; He came to conform us to Christ. And that resemblance, sooner or later, becomes visible—not always with fanfare, but with clarity.

[50] (Gal 5:24)


The Difference Between
Fruit and Gifts
CHAPTER 10
PST. FGB

There exists a surprisingly common confusion in many churches: mistaking gifts for signs of maturity. Visible manifestations are celebrated as if they were proof of character. Over time, this confusion shapes an entire culture: people learn which things "look spiritual" and which—though more biblical—draw less attention.

This is no trivial matter. If we misidentify the evidence, we build spiritual life on faulty diagnosis. It's like applauding a car's shiny dashboard while ignoring the engine's condition. Gifts may be genuine, but the fruit reveals something deeper. The fruit speaks of life. Of transformation. Of Christ being formed in a person when no one is watching.

In the New Testament's plain language, gifts are Spirit-given abilities to serve and build up others; the fruit is Christ's character produced by the Spirit within the believer. One points to usefulness; the other to Christlikeness. One may appear suddenly; the other requires time, obedience, and process. And here's the uncomfortable truth: one can have gifts yet lack fruit.

Paul does not write this to humiliate anyone. He writes this because he loves the church and knows that self-deception is a silent enemy. In 1 Corinthians, a congregation full of charismatic activity was also a

congregation with divisions, pride, tolerated immorality, lawsuits, abuses at the Lord's Supper, and constant competition for prominence. They were not pagans; they were believers. But their spirituality was mixed with carnality, and this prevented them from understanding what truly pleases God.

When Paul lists the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, his intention is not to create a scale of spiritual superiority but to place each gift in its proper function: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."[51] The emphasis is on "for the common good." The manifestation is not a medal for the one who displays it; it is a tool for service. In contrast, when Paul speaks of the fruit in Galatians 5, he does not present it as a work tool but as evidence of new life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. This is a list that cannot be counterfeited for long. One may simulate a gift in front of others, but it is very hard to fake self-control at home, patience under pressure, or gentleness when corrected.

Let's state it plainly: the fruit is not optional. The gifts are. The Spirit distributes gifts "as he wills," but the Spirit produces fruit where he governs. This changes the question many ask. It should not be "What gift do I have?" but "What character is the Spirit forming in me?" Because

[51] (1 Cor 12:7)

the day a person loses their temper with their family, wounds with words, harbors resentment for weeks, and yet feels at peace because they "speak in tongues," or "have a gift", something is out of place. This is not about denying the Spirit's work but about reevaluating what evidence is being used to assess that work.

Paul himself, in 1 Corinthians 13, issues a warning that strikes at the heart of this issue: one may speak in human and angelic tongues yet lack love. One may prophesy, understand mysteries, possess knowledge, and still be "nothing" before God in what matters most. One may give away all possessions to the poor, even surrender their body, and it may count for nothing before the Lord if it does not proceed from love. This does not diminish the importance of gifts, but it shifts the focus to what carries greater weight. Love is not an accessory of Christianity; it is its most basic test.

A pastoral example helps illustrate the difference. More than once, I have heard believers say, "I know I am filled with the Spirit because I feel fire when I pray, and sometimes I speak in tongues for hours."

Then, over time, other facts emerge: broken relationships, unfair business dealings, an inability to ask for forgiveness, small lies justified as "strategies," envy among ministry colleagues. The person is not inventing their

experience; they likely feel something real. The problem is that they were taught to assess their spiritual life by a single sign, and that sign was not designed to bear the full weight of evaluation.

The fruit, on the other hand, is seen in ordinary scenes, without background music. It is seen when someone listens to criticism without becoming aggressive. It is seen when a leader acknowledges a mistake and corrects it without excuses. It is seen when a believer forgoes financial gain to preserve integrity. It is seen when a sister decides not to feed gossip and redirects the conversation. It is seen when a young person turns off their phone and disciplines themselves because they understand that self-control is also spiritual. Is that not evidence of the Spirit? Does it not look more like Christ?

Here it is important to underline another difference: gifts can operate in a person without that person being mature. This does not mean God approves of everything they do, but that God may use someone out of mercy toward others. Scripture shows that the Lord even spoke through flawed instruments at times, and this did not make those instruments models of holiness. It is uncomfortable to accept, but necessary, because many consciences have been numbed by the idea that "if God uses me, then God approves of me." Ministerial usefulness does not equal spiritual health.

Furthermore, gifts often have a public component,

and the public sphere invites comparison. When a church elevates gifts as the primary measure, it inevitably creates categories: the "more anointed" and the "less spiritual." This dynamic causes two harms. On one hand, it inflates the pride of those with visible gifts. On the other, it shames or sidelines those who serve faithfully in obscurity. But the Spirit does not move only where there is a microphone. Often his deepest work happens far from the stage: in silent intercession, in daily faithfulness, in humble service, in obedience when no one applauds.

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul insists on edification. That in itself is a clue. A gift, by definition, must build up the body, not erect a pedestal for the individual. And when it does not edify, Paul does not celebrate it; he regulates it. He even commands silence in certain cases. This clashes with a culture that equates "more manifestation" with "more spirituality." Paul does not think this way. If something does not edify, it is not defended with emotion. It is corrected with obedience.

The fruit, on the other hand, does not need a microphone to edify. A person filled with love creates a different atmosphere. A person with peace calms tensions without imposing silence. Someone with patience endures processes without breaking others. Kindness changes the tone of a community. Goodness produces concrete actions, not just speeches. Faith perseveres when circumstances are unfavorable. Gentleness protects unity because it knows

how to correct without destroying. Self-control prevents sins no one sees but which ultimately destroy families and churches.

There is another practical sign: gifts may vary throughout life and according to the needs of the body, but the fruit should deepen over the years. If someone has been in the faith for decades yet reacts the same as at the beginning with the same harshness, the same ego, the same instability, something is missing. And it is not fixed by seeking an emotional "second experience." It is fixed by returning to the cross, to the Word, to genuine repentance, to daily obedience, to authentic communion with the Spirit.

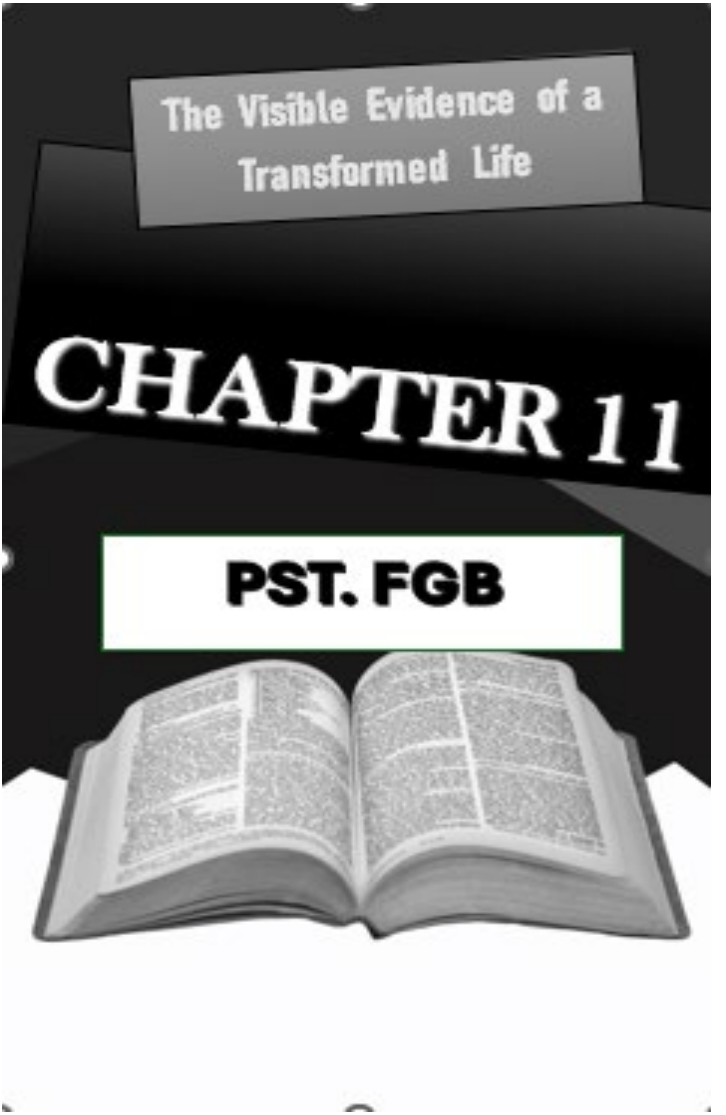
Perhaps someone honestly asks, "So, do gifts not matter?" They do matter. God gave them. It would be disobedient to despise or prohibit them out of reaction. The problem is not the gift but the place assigned to it. When a gift becomes the primary criterion for affirming someone is filled with the Spirit, the door opens to superficial spirituality. Power is confused with holiness. Intensity is confused with obedience. Noise is confused with life.

A healthy church does not eliminate gifts, but neither does it idolize them. It places them under Christ's lordship and the command of love. It recognizes that the greatest need is not more spectacle but more likeness to

Jesus. And it understands that the Holy Spirit was not given to build charismatic personalities but to form disciples.

The evidence of the Spirit is not a moment. It is a trajectory. It is not limited to what happens in a meeting but is revealed in how one lives on Monday. Seen this way, the believer stops chasing signs to say, "I've arrived," and begins walking in reverence, seeking for Christ's character to be visible in daily life.

In the end, the decisive question is not how impressive a manifestation appears but what kind of person is being formed. Because gifts may impress, but the fruit convinces. Gifts may open doors, but the fruit sustains the home. Gifts may draw attention, but the fruit guards the heart. And when the Spirit truly governs, His most consistent evidence is not an occasional outburst but a transformed life.


The Visible Evidence of a Transformed Life
CHAPTER 11
PST. FGB

Some evidence announces itself. Not because it makes noise but because it leaves traces. A tree does not need to defend itself with speeches; it is recognized by its fruit. Something similar happens in the believer's life. The Holy Spirit's work, when real, is not limited to an intense moment in a meeting or a single expression of devotion. It becomes visible in the ordinary, in the repeated, in what almost no one applauds. And it is precisely there, in that ordinary terrain, where the evidence becomes most credible.

Many have been trained to seek a quick sign, an immediate mark to answer the question: Do I have the Spirit? The problem is that this logic often produces two things: pride in those who believe they've met the requirement and anxiety in those who cannot replicate the expected experience. In both cases, a fragile standard takes root. Scripture, however, proposes a soberer and deeper path: the Spirit is recognized in a progressively transformed life, not in an isolated display.

This transformation is not a nebulous idea. It has texture. It can be observed in decisions, reactions, words, and priorities. Paul described it as fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. What is striking is that almost none of these traits is spectacular. They are not designed to impress a visitor. They are designed to sustain a holy life, a healthy family, and an edified community.

The visible evidence begins with the personal—not the private understood as hidden, but the inward. The Spirit does not only inspire songs; He illuminates conscience. He makes the heart sensitive to detect sin where there were once excuses. He stops a person from justifying themselves with phrases like, "That's just how I am" or "That's how we've always been in my family." And a change begins, noticeable in small things: asking for forgiveness without evasion, acknowledging a mistake without manipulating the conversation, returning what was taken, cutting off a habit that fed a double life.

One of the clearest signs of spiritual life is not euphoria but transparency. The Spirit-filled believer learns to live without masks. Not because they always feel strong but because they know God's grace does not depend on their performance. How much spirituality has been confused with intense personality? How much "fire" has been used to cover up an untamed character? The fruit of the Spirit does the opposite: it lowers the volume of the ego and raises moral clarity.

Then there is the realm of family, where the fruit is tested without a microphone. There are brothers who feel like giants in church but are harsh, impatient, and hurtful at home. And this contradiction is not corrected with more meetings but with repentance and obedience. The Spirit produces gentleness, which is not weakness but strength

under control. It produces patience that is not resignation but mastery of impulse. It produces love that is not emotion but sustained commitment.

A common scene—all too common—illustrates this: a father who demands respect but does not know how to speak respectfully. A mother who asks for understanding but reacts with sarcasm when things go wrong. A marriage that prays in public but negotiates in private with contempt and subtle threats. There, the evidence of the Spirit's filling will not be an experience at an altar but the ability to restrain the tongue, lower the tone, truly listen, and ask for forgiveness without making it a formality. The Spirit's peace is not a mystical feeling; it is a new way of responding when pressure rises.

It is also evident in the workplace. It is no coincidence that the fruit includes faithfulness. Faithfulness is expressed in arriving on time, keeping promises, not stealing hours, not inflating reports, not selling an image of competence while living in mediocrity. The believer touched by the Spirit understands that their job is not just a source of income but a place of testimony. And that testimony is measured by actions even a faithless boss can recognize: honesty, responsibility, respect, justice.

In pastoral counseling, I have heard stories that hurt because of their inconsistency. People very expressive in spiritual matters who, when facing a work conflict, resort to lies as their first tool. Or believers who speak of "victory"

but have debts caused by impulses, uncontrolled spending, and lack of self-control. The fruit of the Spirit even touches the use of money. Generosity, prudence, and contentment are very concrete forms of spirituality—sometimes harder than any public manifestation.

The Christian community is another unavoidable mirror. There, the fruit becomes social, visible among brothers and sisters. And here it is good to be direct: a church can have very intense meetings and at the same time be a toxic place. Competition disguised as zeal, gossip disguised as "prayer requests," divisions disguised as "doctrine." None of that comes from the Spirit of holiness. The Spirit unites in truth, not in emotion. And where He is governing, it shows in how differences are resolved.

Community patience is a thermometer. When someone falls, the flesh wants two extremes: to crush without mercy or to cover up without repentance. The Spirit guides to a narrower, healthier path: restoration with truth. Kindness is not permissiveness. Goodness is not complicity. To love is not to tell everyone they are fine but to lead them to Christ with clarity and compassion. That requires courage and tenderness at once, and this balance is not produced by human temperament; it is formed by the Spirit.

Another visible evidence is self-control in

communication. A Spirit-filled church is not recognized by its volume but by its edification. Not just by how much is spoken but by how it is spoken. Words that lift up, that correct without humiliating, that encourage without flattery. Words not used to manipulate, control, or instill fear. Spiritual maturity is evident when a believer knows when to remain silent. Also when they can speak at the right time—without cowardice but with respect.

Here it is good to pause on something many avoid: the Spirit is not only "felt," He is obeyed. And obedience hurts when it touches protected areas. A believer can have years of emotional experiences and still fail to learn how to honor their spouse, treat their children with dignity, ask for forgiveness, be accountable, abandon an improper relationship, or control their tongue. In such cases, the problem is not a lack of "anointing" but a lack of surrender.

A transformed life is also evidenced in how suffering is handled. The Spirit's joy is not easy laughter. It is inner steadfastness when everything shakes. It is the ability to keep doing what is right even when one's mood is not perfect. I have seen believers endure illnesses, losses, and betrayals and still maintain a clean spirit, without becoming cynical or bitter—not because they are made of iron but because they have learned to rest in God and walk with hope. That, for the church and the world, is a powerful testimony.

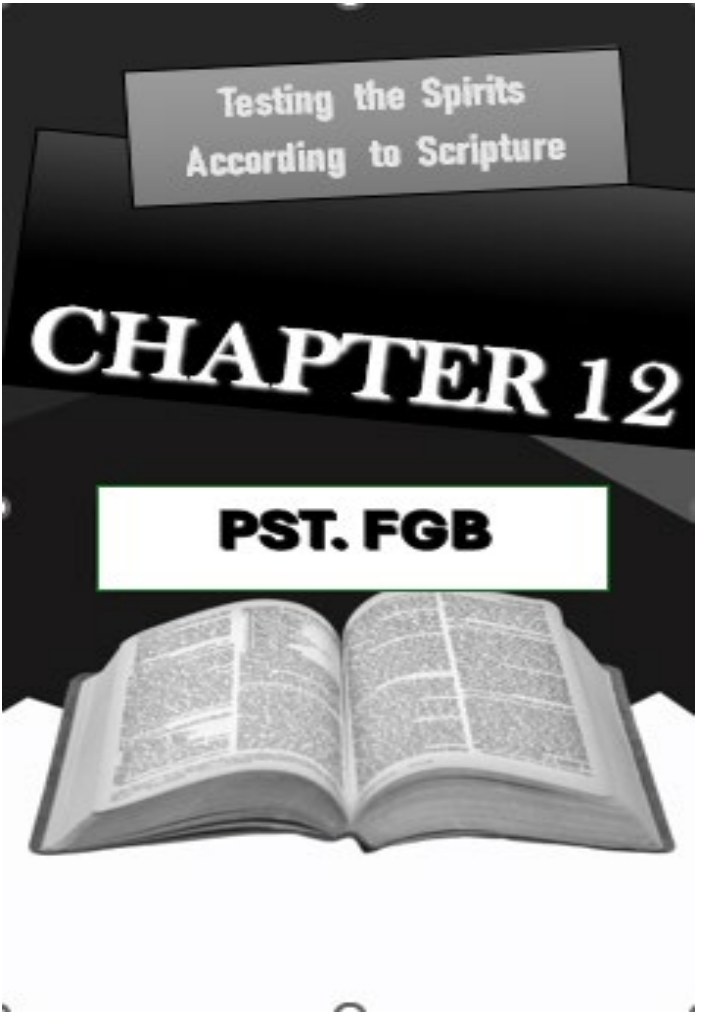
Faith, understood as faithfulness and trust in God, is shown when there are no immediate results. When the answer does not come, when the door does not open, when ministry does not grow, when personal plans fail. There it is revealed what evidence we are seeking. If the evidence were an experience, it would be enough to repeat the stimulus. If the evidence is fruit, then it is tested with time, perseverance, and obedience.

Let us not idealize the process. No one manifests the fruit perfectly. The fruit grows. There are stages. There is pruning. There are seasons of learning. But precisely for this reason, it is evidence: because it marks a direction, not a moment. The Spirit leads to a life that increasingly resembles Christ. And this resemblance is noticeable in what was once normal but now feels uncomfortable. In what was once celebrated and is now confessed. In what was once hidden and is now brought into the light.

A simple question can serve as an honest examination: If all public expression were silenced today—if there were no music, no atmosphere, no platform, no space to impress—what would remain of my spirituality? How would I treat my loved ones? How would I respond to an offense? What would I do with my anger? With my eyes? With my time? With my money? There, without staging, the fruit speaks.

The church needs to recover this kind of evidence because it is what protects the flock. A community that learns to discern by the fruit and not by the impact will be less vulnerable to deception, abuse, and charismatic leadership without character. It will also be more tender toward sincere believers who don't fit certain molds but display an obedient, humble, and growing life. This is a more biblical spiritual justice: it does not reward the loudest but the most faithful.

The evidence of the Spirit is not limited to a moment, a gift, or a manifestation. It is seen in a life that changes direction and learns to walk in Christ's character. It is less spectacular, yes. But it is more reliable. And in the end, more necessary. Because what sustains the church is not an occasional sign but a transformed people.


Testing the Spirits
According to Scripture
CHAPTER 12
PST. FGB

There is a word that sounds uncomfortable in certain Christian circles: discernment. It unsettles because it forces a pause, a question, an examination. And when a community is accustomed to measuring spirituality by emotional intensity, volume, tears, or visible manifestations, any invitation to "examine" seems like a lack of faith. But the Bible does not treat discernment as carnal suspicion but as mature obedience. It is not about quenching the Spirit but about honoring Him.

The apostolic exhortation is clear: "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God."[52] This implies, by definition, that not everything presented as spiritual originates from the Holy Spirit. It also implies that the believer is not called to be naive. And here arises a real tension many leaders have learned to avoid: if we claim every manifestation is automatically divine, we nullify the responsibility to examine. But if we obey the command to examine, then we accept that some experiences must be weighed and, if necessary, corrected.

Weighing the spirits does not mean hunting for errors with an arrogant magnifying glass. It means submitting every teaching, practice, and experience to the revealed standard. Scripture does not adapt to experience. Experience submits to Scripture. It may sound harsh, but it

[52] (1 John 4:1)

is the only way to protect the church from two extremes: the cynicism that denies the supernatural and the enthusiasm that accepts everything unfiltered.

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul does not dispute the existence of gifts. Nor does he ridicule them. What he does is subject them to the criteria of edification, intelligibility, and order. "For God is not a God of confusion but of peace."[53] This phrase, often repeated, is rarely applied seriously. In practice, it has been used as an elegant closing to a chaotic service, not as actual correction of what caused it. And yet, Paul places it as a doctrinal principle: God's character is reflected in how His work manifests in the congregation.

Discernment, then, is not just identifying obvious heresies. It is also evaluating whether a supposedly spiritual practice is producing what the Spirit produces. The question is not merely, "Does this feel spiritual?" but: Does this edify? Does this reflect apostolic order? Does this propel toward holiness? Does this exalt Christ or exalt the experience?" In a time when many confuse emotional impact with divine approval, these questions are not optional.

The doctrinal test is fundamental. Paul warns the Galatians that they could be deceived even by a message

[53] (1 Cor 14:33)

that seemed spiritual but altered the gospel.[54] The problem was not that the Galatians were atheists but that they were adopting a distorted version of the faith. This should shake us. A church can sing, pray, fast, and still embrace harmful doctrinal emphases. When a doctrine becomes "untouchable," it ceases to be doctrine and becomes sacred tradition. And tradition, when it refuses to be corrected by the Word, ends up competing with it.

Here, it helps to ground this in something concrete. I have heard believers say sincerely, "I know the Spirit is here because tongues were spoken." Others say, "I know the service was powerful because everyone fell." Some leaders declare, "God moved because there were shouts and trembling." And what if not? What if God was calling for silent repentance? What if the Spirit was producing conviction, self-control, clarity, reconciliation, and we overlooked it because it wasn't spectacular? The danger is not in manifestations occurring, but in them becoming the primary thermometer of spiritual health.

Scripture offers more solid criteria. One of them is the centrality of Christ. The Holy Spirit is not a protagonist competing for attention; His work exalts the Son. Jesus said the Spirit would glorify Him.[55] This is why a gathering can be full of religious expressions and yet relegate Christ to the

[54] (Galatians 1:6-9)
[55] (John 16:14)

background. When the main conversation after the service is "what I felt" or "what happened to me," and not "what Christ demanded" or "what the Word corrected," it's time to pause. The Spirit can move us, yes, but He also teaches, sanctifies, and orders life around obedience.

Another criterion is fruit. As emphasized in previous chapters: the fruit of the Spirit is not decoration; it is evidence. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control[56] are not Sunday emotions but Monday character. This is why honest discernment asks: What is this practice producing over time? If after years of "revival" a community remains marked by gossip, ambition, divisions, tolerated immorality, and a lack of mercy, something is wrong at the root. It's not about perfection, but direction. The Spirit guides toward Christlikeness, not dependence on stimuli.

There is also the criterion of intelligibility and edification. Paul is insistent: if the church does not understand, it is not edified. The constant emphasis on unintelligible expressions as if they were the pinnacle of spirituality contradicts the spirit of the passage. Not because tongues don't exist, but because they were not given to replace teaching or to disorder the gathering. Edification is not a vague feeling of "I got recharged," but understanding that drives obedience. There are people who weep all night

[56] (Gal 5:22-23)

at an altar and yet return home to treat their family harshly, kicking the dog and cat. That's not a mystery; it's a sign that emotion was not accompanied by transformation.

Discernment also includes the humility to admit we can confuse human stimuli with divine activity. Music, lighting, peer pressure, fatigue, suggestion, expectation, even the sincere desire to please God, can intensify reactions. None of this automatically renders an experience false, but it compels us not to absolutize it. Biblical faith does not rest on emotional highs; it rests on revealed truth. And when people learn to depend on a "feeling," sooner or later they become frustrated. They seek to repeat it. They chase it. And in that pursuit, they become vulnerable to manipulation—both from others and from their own hearts.

There's another delicate aspect: discerning motivations. Paul warns that even genuine gifts can operate in an immature heart. This is why 1 Corinthians is so uncomfortable. The church had manifestations, but it also had carnality. The remedy was not to deny the gifts but to reorder them under love and the common good. This logic is pastorally urgent today. It's not enough to ask if there is power; we must ask if there is character. It's not enough to ask if there was "anointing"; we must ask if there was obedience. And this directly impacts the doctrine of "normative evidence." If a church teaches that the decisive sign of the Spirit's filling is speaking in tongues, it risks forming believers obsessed with an external mark yet

tolerant of an unyielded heart.

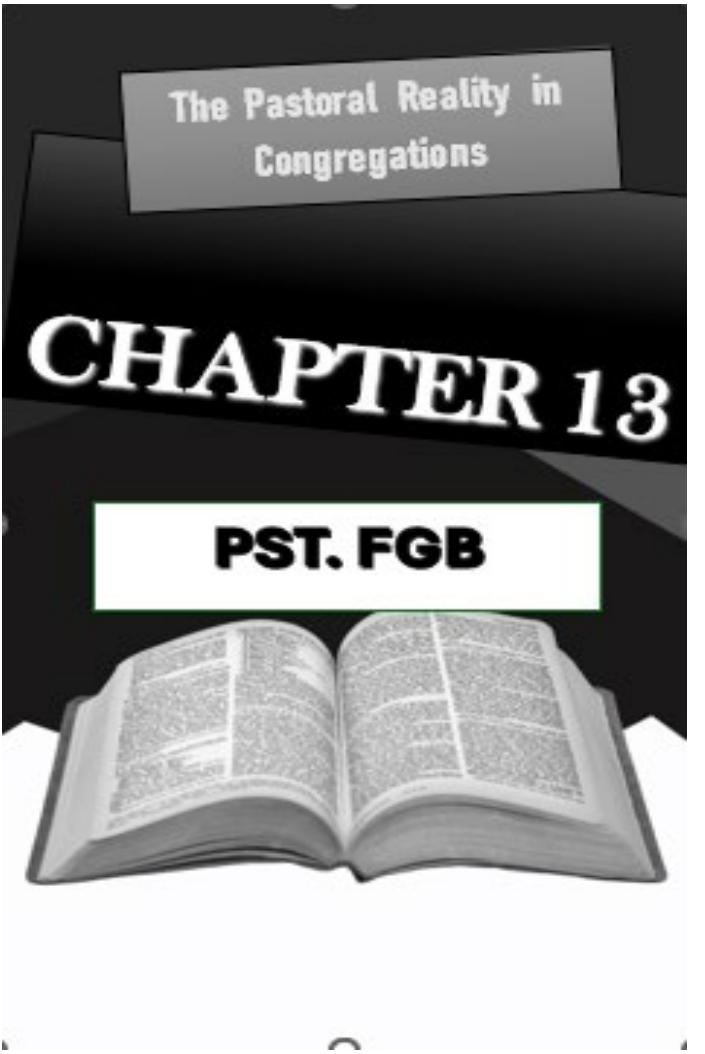
Weighing the spirits according to Scripture also requires courage. It's uncomfortable to say, "This isn't right." Even more so when the practice is entrenched, when people love it, when there are stories of intense experiences. Yet biblical love is not permissiveness. Love protects. And part of protecting is setting boundaries, as Paul did. A leader who fails to correct disorder out of fear of rejection isn't shepherding; they're managing expectations.

At the same time, this discernment must be accompanied by gentleness. There are believers who have been sincere, who have sought God with all their heart, and who have interpreted their experience according to what they were taught. They aren't won over by mockery or contempt. They are helped with patience, by opening Scripture, asking questions, and showing God's purpose. A shift in emphasis doesn't happen through scolding but through conviction born of the Word and confirmed in a more stable, holier, freer life.

The church needs to recover a culture where evaluation is normal. Where it's normal to ask: Is this written? Does this edify? Does this produce fruit? Does this reflect God's character?" A church that does not test the spirits ends up being led by impulses. And a church led by impulses, though it calls itself spiritual, is exposed to serious

errors.

Biblical discernment does not quench the fire. It channels it. It does not deny the supernatural. It purifies it. And in the end, the result is more beautiful than any spectacle: a community that does not live by signs to feel alive, but lives by Christ, walks in the Spirit, and displays—without the need for exaggerations—the most convincing evidence there is: a transformed life.


The Pastoral Reality in Congregations
CHAPTER 13
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In pastoral work, one quickly learns that doctrines do not live on the whiteboard but in a living room, in a hospital hallway, in the tension of a marriage, in the silence of a young person who no longer wants to return to church. This is why, when a congregation adopts speaking in tongues as the definitive evidence of the Spirit's filling, it is not merely taking a theological stance. It is creating an environment. It is defining expectations, establishing categories of acceptance, and shaping consciences.

I have seen this reality repeat itself far too often. The intention is usually good. Many leaders sincerely desire the church to experience God deeply. The problem is that when a specific sign is elevated as universal proof, spiritual life ends up reduced to a checkpoint. And sooner or later, people adapt to that system.

The Silent Pressure to "Have the Experience"

There is a scene that repeats itself in different places under different names. A group of believers—sometimes new, sometimes with years of faith—comes forward because they "need to receive." The atmosphere is intense. They are told to raise their hands, to stop thinking, to open their mouths, to repeat a syllable, to "let it flow." Some cry, others tremble, and others freeze in shame. And in the end, many leave with the feeling that something was missing.

The pastoral question is inevitable: What do we do with these people afterward? How do we look at them the following week? Because the issue is not that someone prays fervently or gets emotional. The issue is what this dynamic communicates. It communicates that there is a second tier of Christians. It communicates that without a certain

manifestation, one has not yet "entered in." It communicates that the Spirit's presence is measured by a sign not everyone receives, even though 1 Corinthians 12 asks plainly: "Do all speak in tongues?" Paul's implied answer is no. So why do these congregations insist that all their members speak in tongues?

The pressure can be so strong that some end up imitating what they see. Not necessarily with malice. Sometimes out of a desire to fit in, sometimes out of fear of being labeled "unbelieving," sometimes out of weariness from feeling inadequate. Who wants to be the only one who comes forward and receives nothing? Who wants to hear, over and over, that they lack sufficient faith? This pressure, though unspoken, becomes involuntary discipleship. The church teaches, through actions, that the visible matters more than the obedient.

Those Who "Speak" and Those Who Bear Guilt

In many congregations, two groups form—though no one admits it: those who already have "the evidence" and those who don't yet. The former are considered ready to lead, pray for others, and participate in "spiritual" matters. The latter are assigned, explicitly or subtly, the label of immature, cold, or resistant.

Over time, this division produces something more serious: spirituality becomes a status. It doesn't matter if someone is quick-tempered, fails to pay debts, treats their family with contempt, spreads gossip, or lives without self-control. If they "speak," they're assumed to be filled with the Spirit. And if someone has a gentle character, serves faithfully, cares for their home, loves Scripture, and pursues holiness

but hasn't had that manifestation, they remain under suspicion.

This is no exaggeration. It's a real pastoral distortion. And the most painful part is seeing sincere believers carrying guilt for years, as if the Holy Spirit were a prize earned through enough emotional intensity. I've heard phrases like these: "I know God loves me, but it seems He doesn't want to fill me," or "Maybe I still have something hidden," or "I'm afraid I'm a second-class Christian."

What kind of fruit does this system produce? Spiritual anxiety, comparison, frustration. And in some cases, resentment. Some don't leave because of a lack of faith but because of exhaustion from a standard they can never reach.

When the Spectacular Displaces the Essential

Church life isn't limited to services. It happens in conversations, decisions, in what's celebrated and what's corrected. When tongues become the primary thermometer, leadership begins investing energy where they believe the evidence lies. They schedule vigils seeking "to be filled," chase "moments," multiply altar calls—but neglect personal discipleship. And in an era where pastors are absent most of the time and home visits are nonexistent, the quick fix of tongues fits like a glove.

Sometimes it's clearest in the topics that are rarely addressed. One can speak for hours about fire, anointing, atmospheres, and dedicate mere minutes to basic matters like forgiveness, purity, marital reconciliation, work ethics, financial transparency, and taming the tongue. Yet Paul was direct: the fruit of the Spirit is displayed in daily life. It is not

an ornament for worship. It is the character of Christ forming habits.

I have accompanied cases where individuals were recognized for their public manifestations but lived in destructive patterns privately. Not because the gifts themselves were false, but because a gift was never a guarantee of transformation. This confusion ends up normalizing what should be confronted in love. And thus emerges a painful contradiction: churches with intense gatherings but cold relationships; strong worship but weak reconciliation; many "spiritual" words but little silent obedience.

The Cost to the Most Vulnerable

There is a group that often pays the price in a special way: new converts. They arrive hungry, wounded, with questions. They need grounding, support, time in the Word, healthy community. But if the first thing they are taught is that the immediate goal is to "speak in tongues," they are given an incomplete map.

Some grow frustrated because they cannot produce what is expected. Others achieve it quickly and believe they have arrived. In both cases, the risk is the same: a faith built on an isolated sign, not on continual repentance, communion with Christ, and persevering obedience.

I have also seen those with backgrounds of spiritual abuse. For them, group pressure can be devastating. If someone has learned to please others to avoid conflict, it is not hard for them to confuse "receiving" with an obligation. Sometimes they end up forcing themselves, and later carry an

even greater guilt: "I said something, but I don't know if it was real." This insecurity can haunt them for years.

The church should be the place where conscience is relieved by the truth of the gospel, not entangled by requirements not established in Scripture.

Pastoral Discernment: What Truly Edifies

Over the years I have learned to ask simpler, more biblical questions when someone claims to have been filled with the Spirit. I don't first ask about a manifestation. I ask about direction. What's happening with your obedience? Is there conviction of sin and a real desire for change? How are you treating your spouse, your children, your parents? Does your speech build up or tear down? Does your private life resemble your public life? Are you learning to say no when you couldn't before?

These are uncomfortable questions, but they are healthy. Because the evidence of the Spirit isn't sustained by a moment but by a trajectory. It isn't proven at the altar but in character. It isn't limited to what happens in a meeting but to what happens when no one is watching.

I've known believers who never spoke in tongues yet displayed disarming maturity. People who forgave the unforgivable, who held their family together in crisis, who served without recognition, who rejected sin when it cost them dearly. That kind of life isn't manufactured by emotion. It's fruit. And fruit, by definition, takes time.

Restoring a Culture of Edification

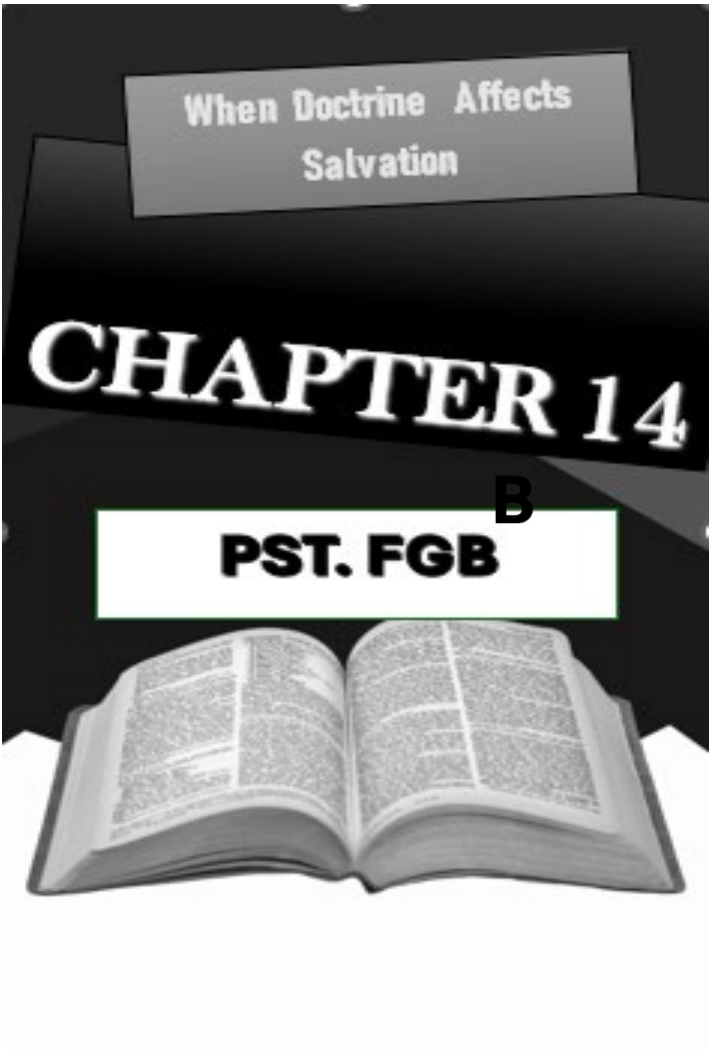
A healthy congregation doesn't despise gifts but orders them. It doesn't quench the Spirit but doesn't confuse Him with disorder. It doesn't pursue experiences as trophies but seeks edification. Paul insisted the church must understand, learn, and be strengthened. This requires clarity, teaching, correction, and also patience.

Part of the pastoral reality is admitting that changing a culture is costly. If for years the primary evidence was taught to be a manifestation, reorienting toward the fruit of the Spirit may feel, to some, like a loss. "So does nothing we experienced count?" It counts insofar as it produced obedience, love, and reverence. But it doesn't count as a universal rule to measure the Spirit's presence in everyone.

The pastoral call isn't to humiliate those who value tongues but to realign the weight where Scripture places it. If a church wants to be truly spiritual, it should be recognized for its love, practical holiness, self-control, everyday righteousness, capacity for reconciliation, and care for the vulnerable.

In the end, the question that reveals reality is simple yet profound: If all the spectacular elements vanished tomorrow, would there remain a community that loves, serves, lives in the light, and perseveres? If the answer is uncertain, it's not a problem of lacking gifts. It's a problem of foundation.

And the foundation, as always, isn't found in what impresses instantly but in what transforms forever.


When Doctrine Affects Salvation
CHAPTER 14
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There are doctrinal errors that feel like a matter of emphasis, not a threat. They seem like internal debates, issues of tradition or style. However, when a church teaches that the normative evidence of the Spirit's filling is speaking in tongues, it isn't just organizing congregational life around a gift. It is effectively defining who "has" and who "does not have" what God promises to every believer. And when the evidence is redefined, the lived gospel is altered, Christian assurance is distorted, and a dangerous door is opened: confusing experience with salvation and emotion with new birth.

Salvation does not depend on a particular gift. It depends on Christ, received by faith. This statement is basic, yes, but in pastoral practice it becomes urgent. Because in many communities, the real message—though not written in any doctrinal document—sounds like this: "If you haven't spoken in tongues, you're still missing something essential." They may not outright say "you're not saved," but the effect is similar. A category of "complete" believers and another of "incomplete" believers is created, and this incompleteness is eventually associated with lack of spirituality, lack of legitimacy, and even lack of full acceptance.

The uncomfortable question is inevitable: What happens to a person who loves the Lord, believes the gospel, seeks to live in holiness, serves faithfully, but has never spoken in tongues? If the church keeps telling them that the true evidence is not in their perseverance or fruit but in a specific manifestation, that person begins to doubt the most basic things. They doubt their conversion, their adoption, the Spirit's work within them. And this doubt doesn't always produce humility. Sometimes it produces anxiety, constant

comparison, and a desperate search for a sign to quiet their conscience.

I've seen sincere believers weep over this. Not weeping over sin, which would be a healthy sorrow, but over their inability to reproduce an experience. "Pastor, I pray, I fast, I attend church, but it just doesn't happen," said a young woman with a Bible worn from underlining. She wasn't justifying a disordered life. She was seeking certainty. And the church, unintentionally, had changed the thermometer: it wasn't measuring life, it was measuring phenomena. The result was a burden Christ never placed on anyone.

At this point, doctrine ceases to be a secondary matter. It affects salvation in at least three concrete ways: it distorts the believer's assurance, promotes a false righteousness based on signs, and weakens the biblical call to repentance and obedience.

First, it distorts the believer's assurance. The New Testament teaches that the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are God's children,[57] and that this witness is accompanied by a life that learns to say "Abba, Father," and by a walk that bears fruit. This isn't about cheap assurance but about certainty grounded in Christ's work and confirmed by real transformation. When the community replaces this evidence with a charismatic experience, the believer learns to look to a moment, not to Christ. They learn to lean on an experience, not on the promise. And if that moment never comes, or if it comes but later fades, their faith hangs by an emotional thread.

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[57] (Rom 8:16)

Second, it promotes a false righteousness based on signs. Humanity has an ancient inclination to want to "display" spirituality. It's easier to exhibit an intense moment than to sustain a life of meekness, self-control, and forgiveness. A doctrine that absolutizes tongues can, unintentionally, produce a culture of external validation. In this culture, some quickly learn which behaviors are celebrated and replicate them. I say this carefully, because I don't want to accuse everyone of pretense. But it's pastorally honest to recognize that pressure can push people toward two equally dangerous paths: conscious imitation or unconscious self-suggestion.

Conscious imitation happens when someone thinks, "If this is what will give me a place, I'll do it." Not necessarily with malice, but with a hunger for belonging. Unconscious self-suggestion happens when a person desires so strongly to meet the expectation that they interpret sounds, impulses, or repetitions as a definitive "yes" from God. Then they feel relieved, not because they've understood the gospel more deeply, but because they've passed the communal filter. The peace they receive isn't always the peace of Christ—it's the peace of fitting in.

The problem is that this dynamic can create "assured" members without real conversion. How? Because the church ends up certifying spirituality by a sign that can appear without repentance. And this is serious. Jesus Himself warned that there would be those who claimed experiences and works, yet He would say, "I never knew you."[58] The ultimate criterion wasn't spectacle but obedience born of a true relationship. When a congregation places its stamp of approval on signs, it

[58] (Matt 7:21-23)

risks offering comfort where confrontation is needed, and applause where repentance should be called for.

Third, it weakens the call to fruit and holiness. If the center of spiritual life becomes a charismatic moment, character formation is sidelined. There's much talk of "fire," but little of self-control. Tears at the altar are celebrated, but grudges at home are tolerated. Freedom in worship is presumed, but lack of reconciliation is normalized. And the Holy Spirit, according to Galatians, isn't recognized by sustained disorder or lack of love. He's recognized by fruit that matures over time, especially where no one is applauding.

Someone might object: "But tongues appear in Acts." Yes, they do. And precisely for that reason we must treat them with biblical seriousness, not with oversimplifications. In 1 Corinthians, Paul regulates their use—he doesn't deny it. But neither does he make it a universal test. His rhetorical question is devastating to the modern framework: "Do all speak with tongues?" The implied answer is no. And if not all, then it cannot be the normative evidence of a filling God commands for all believers. The problem isn't the gift. The problem is the doctrine that absolutizes it.

When that absolutization takes root, collateral damage emerges that indirectly—but genuinely—affects salvation. One such consequence is the creation of a spiritual elite. Those who speak in tongues sometimes occupy, even unintentionally, the place of "those who have arrived." They're listened to more, given platforms faster, attributed an invisible authority. Meanwhile, the faithful, unassuming, steady brother who serves quietly and loves his family may be treated as someone "not yet filled." This inversion of values contradicts the logic of the kingdom. In the kingdom, the

greatest is the one who serves. In the kingdom, the fruit of the Spirit isn't an accessory—it's evidence of life.

Another damage is the confusion between justification and growth. Instead of telling the new convert, "You're accepted in Christ—now walk and mature," they're told, "You're accepted when you have this sign." Categories are blurred. Justification by faith becomes, in practice, justification by experience. And when people live this way, they oscillate between pride and guilt. Pride if they achieve the sign. Guilt if they don't. Both are enemies of the gospel.

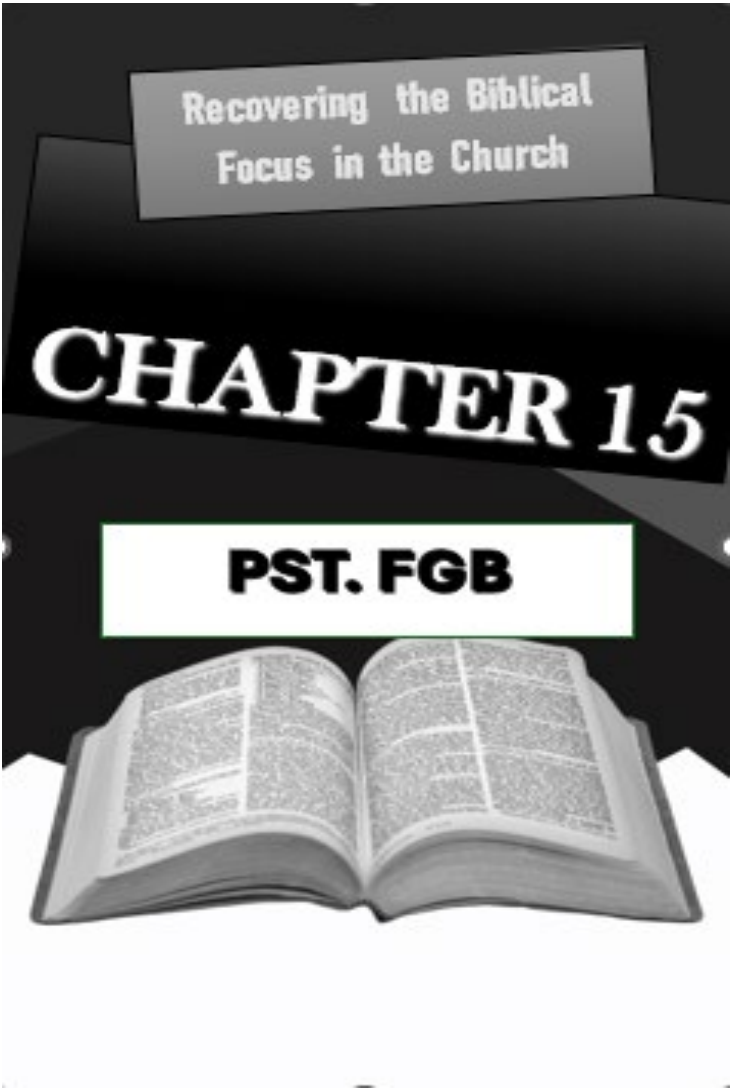
There's also the effect on those who do speak in tongues—and here it's crucial to be very clear. Having a charismatic experience doesn't immunize against sin. In fact, it sometimes breeds false confidence: "If I speak in tongues, then I'm good." It's a simple phrase, but it works like anesthesia. And when the soul is anesthetized, sin isn't treated seriously. Religious intensity compensates for what's lacking in obedience. Anointing is confused with character, and charisma with holiness. The result can be devastating: a person who serves, sings, prays fervently—but lives without self-control, financial integrity, or private faithfulness. What does the doctrine do? It offers them an alibi.

At this point, it's helpful to return to a pastoral question rarely asked aloud: If the Spirit is filling someone, what should be noticeable first in their daily life? Not in worship, but at home. Not at the microphone, but at the table. Is there patience? Gentleness under pressure? Truth without manipulation? Is there a growing love for Scripture and the church? A genuine willingness to forgive? These evidences don't make headlines, but they sustain faith when emotions fade.

Salvation, of course, is God's work. No one can snatch Christ's own from His hand. But a doctrine can obscure the gospel to the point of making it hard for people to rest in Christ, and it can also enable others to deceive themselves with signs. That's why this issue isn't just about denominational preferences. It carries eternal weight.

If a leader teaches—even by omission—that the definitive evidence is a manifestation, he must ask whether he's preparing his people for the evil day. Because the evil day comes. Illness, loss, family crisis, temptation, persecution, or exhaustion. On that day, what sustains isn't remembering a sound uttered at an altar. What sustains is knowing Christ is sufficient, His blood is real, His Spirit produces perseverance, and the fruit—though imperfect—is visible and growing.

In the end, the church isn't called to manufacture quick "proofs" of spirituality but to make disciples. And true discipleship always centers on what the Spirit came to do: glorify Christ, convict of sin, guide into truth, and produce new life. Everything else—even gifts—finds its right place when salvation isn't confused with a sign but is recognized by a transformation that withstands the test of time.


Recovering the Biblical Focus in the Church
CHAPTER 15
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There are moments when a church doesn't need a new idea but to recover an ancient truth it stopped practicing. In many congregations, the problem isn't lack of activity but lack of direction. There are packed meetings, full agendas, well-rehearsed spiritual language—and yet a simple question goes unanswered: Are we being conformed to Christ's image, or just repeating a religious culture?

For years, it's been taught—explicitly or through constant insinuation—that the reliable sign of the Spirit's filling is a particular manifestation. This has produced a kind of Christian anxious to "attain" an experience but poorly trained to sustain a life. The results often show in everyday realities: broken marriages, leaders without self-control, prolonged conflicts, little accountability, and a strange tolerance for sin as long as the worship feels intense.

Recovering biblical focus doesn't mean quenching fervor. It means placing fervor under Scripture's light and in service of genuine edification. The church wasn't designed to produce moments, but disciples.

Returning to Paul's logic: edify, understand, obey.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul doesn't discuss tongues as if they were Christianity's centerpiece. He places them in proper perspective. He acknowledges their existence, establishes boundaries, and repeats an often-overlooked principle: what doesn't edify shouldn't dominate the gathering.

In that letter, the question isn't "what feels most spiritual?" but "what produces maturity in the body?" Biblical

focus is recovered when a church begins thinking like the apostle again. This isn't about denying the supernatural, but submitting it to God's purpose. Paul never presents disorder as evidence of spiritual freedom. Nor does he equate noise with power. The Spirit produces clarity, love, self-control, and a life that can be examined without fear.

Here's a simple pastoral test: If someone claims to be filled with the Spirit, how does that look on Monday? How do they speak to their spouse? Treat their children? Respond to correction? Keep their word? Ask for forgiveness sincerely? These questions aren't "less spiritual." They're profoundly spiritual because they touch the fruit.

Reordering teaching: from gifts as trophies to fruit as evidence.

Many distortions originate in the pulpit—not from ill intent, but from years of repeated emphases. If every sermon about the Spirit culminates in the same manifestation, the church learns to pursue that as the goal. And if that manifestation becomes the metric for determining who "has" and who "hasn't," a dangerous environment emerges: pride in some, shame in others, and self-deception in many.

Biblical recovery requires patiently and courageously reordering teaching. Galatians 5 must resound powerfully—not as a nice memory verse, but as the portrait of the Spirit in action. Love isn't an accessory; it's the primary evidence. Peace isn't momentary emotion; it's inner stability enduring real pressures. Self-control isn't a personality trait; it's the Spirit's work governing desires and reactions.

Practically, this means discipleship can't revolve around "activating gifts" but "walking in the Spirit." And walking is learned through habits: prayer with understanding, serious Bible reading, confession of sins, accountability, humble service, and concrete obedience.

Restoring spiritual discipline and pastoral discipline.

Disordered emphasis on charismatic expression often brings a silent side effect: the church becomes permissive with character—especially when someone "flows" in the meeting. What shouldn't be tolerated is excused because the person is "used." But in the New Testament, being used isn't synonymous with being approved. That's why Paul could say he disciplined his body—not to be more impressive, but to avoid disqualification.

Recovering biblical focus demands returning to personal spiritual discipline and loving pastoral discipline. Discipline isn't harshness. Discipline is care. It's the conviction that sin isn't negotiable and holiness isn't improvised.

Pastorally, this means accompanying processes, correcting with Scripture, calling for repentance when needed, and protecting the congregation from influences that promote disorder. Some churches have learned to "manage" conflicts without resolving them, to "turn the page" without confronting sin. That isn't peace—it's postponement.

Biblical discipline also includes something uncomfortable today: evaluating leaders by character, not just capability. A leader who prays loudly but doesn't govern his tongue with gentleness will eventually harm others. A leader

who impresses publicly but manipulates privately isn't a blessing—he's a risk.

Simpler, deeper gatherings: order, edification, and conscious participation.

Some congregations have confused God's presence with increased stimulation—louder volume, more shouting, longer climaxes. Sometimes, the more emotion is pushed, the less the message is understood. Paul doesn't disdain intensity but insists on comprehension. He wants a church that can say "amen" with understanding, not just react.

Recovering biblical focus doesn't necessarily mean colder meetings—it means comprehensible ones. It means worship isn't a ladder to ecstasy but a reverent response to God's character. It means preaching exposes the text clearly and applies it honestly. It means spiritual gifts, when exercised, follow apostolic order—with interpretation when needed, clear boundaries, and the goal of edification. Such change often meets resistance. Some will feel "it's not like before." The right question is: Was "before" more biblical? Nostalgia isn't a theological argument. There are congregational habits sustained by custom, not by biblical conviction.

More than once, I've witnessed the good that comes from more orderly gatherings. A church that quiets the noise can heighten attention. A church that makes space for the Word can begin to be transformed. And over time, people discover something surprising: God's presence doesn't depend on us losing control, but on Christ being exalted and obeyed.

Healing the Damage Caused by False Evidence

When a manifestation is taught as normative evidence, real wounds occur. Sincere believers may come to think God has rejected them because they haven't had a particular experience. Others, under social pressure, imitate what they see and end up living a faith based on appearances. And some, accustomed to measuring spirituality by externals, become unable to discern their inner condition.

Biblical recovery includes pastoral work of healing and reeducation. Sometimes we must sit with someone and calmly say: "Your assurance doesn't depend on that. The Spirit's evidence is seen in your faith in Christ and the fruit growing in your life." We must help them read Scripture with fresh eyes. We must remind them the Spirit isn't earned through a moment but received by grace and produces progressive transformation. We must also speak with those who've used this issue to establish hierarchies. In any community where some consider themselves "more filled" because of a manifestation, pride takes root— a respectable sin. And pride quenches the Spirit as much as immorality—it just does so with religious language.

Evaluating Spirituality by Its Ethical Impact

A church can assess its spiritual health with very concrete questions: Is there real reconciliation or just prolonged silences? Is generosity growing or is everything sustained by pressure? Do people learn to forgive or become experts at accusing? Do young people see integrity or double lives? Do leaders practice accountability or protect one another?

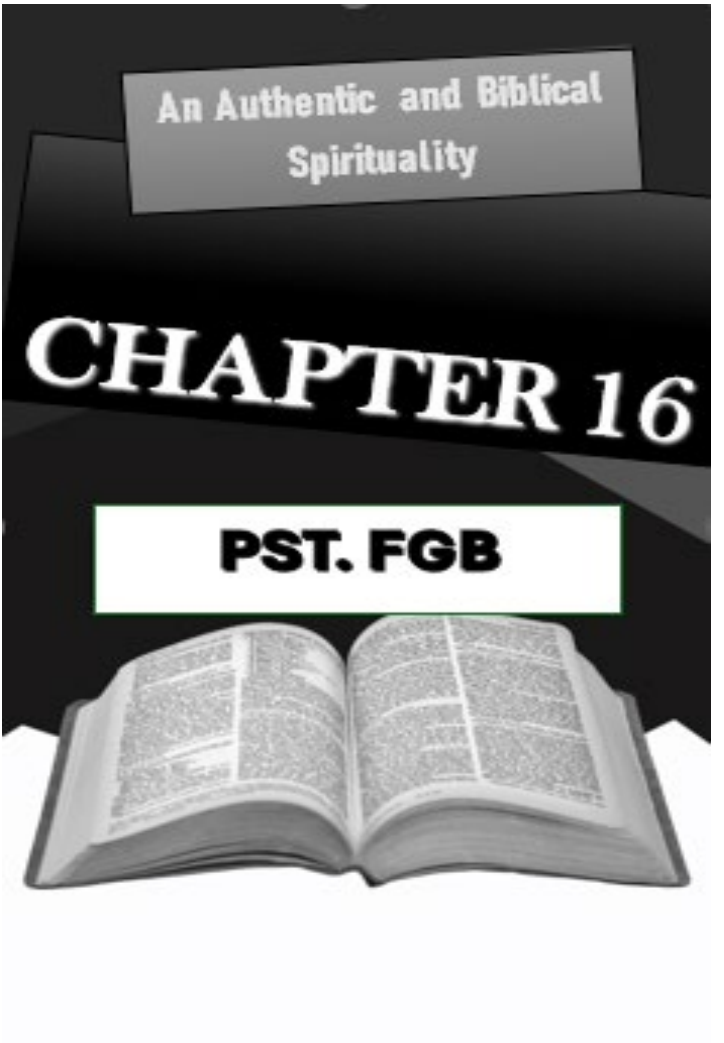
The Spirit's fruit isn't theoretical. It becomes visible in small decisions: how money is managed, how authority is exercised, how correction is given, how those who are absent are spoken of, how service happens when no one applauds. When the Spirit fills, Christ is formed. And when Christ is formed, the church becomes a safer place for the weak, more uncomfortable for the hypocrite, and more useful to the world.

A Call to Leaders and Congregations: Courage to Adjust Course

Recovering biblical focus requires leaders who love people more than reputation, and congregations who love truth more than custom. Adjusting course may cost attendees, criticism, and misunderstandings. But there's a greater gain: a church more like Jesus.

One question remains worth holding in our hearts—not as a threat, but as guidance: If all external manifestations ceased tomorrow, would it still be evident the Spirit is among us? If the answer depends on a single phenomenon, the focus needs correction. If the answer rests on love, holiness, humility, obedience, and a community built up by the Word, then we're on the right path.

The church isn't called to impress, but to reflect. And the Spirit's most reliable reflection isn't a moment of exaltation, but a transformed life that gradually learns to resemble Christ.


An Authentic and Biblical Spirituality
CHAPTER 16
PST. FGB

There's a spirituality that makes noise and another that puts down roots. The first often impresses: it raises hands, fills auditoriums, multiplies striking testimonies. The second rarely appears on video—but sustains marriages when they grow cold, cleanses the heart when no one sees, and keeps believers steadfast when there's no applause or background music. If the church wants to return to what's biblical, it must learn to tell the difference.

Many have grown up believing the Spirit's filling is confirmed by a specific sign—almost always immediate and visible. This is understandable, because the visible reassures. It gives the impression faith can be measured. The problem is God won't always be confined to our verification systems. Sometimes His deepest work happens in silence, like seed beneath soil. How many holy decisions, difficult acts of forgiveness, secret "no's" to temptation are worth more than a minute of intense emotion? And yet few things are less celebrated than consistent obedience.

Authentic spirituality begins with real surrender. Not with a repeated phrase, but with a posture that endures when enthusiasm fades. Paul didn't describe the Spirit-filled believer as someone who masters a manifestation, but as someone who learns to walk, be led, live. It's the language of process. "Walk by the Spirit" doesn't resemble a spark—it resembles a path. And a path is known by its direction, not a moment of speed.

That surrender is first seen in hunger for the Word. Not through debate, but through the truth that confronts. Scripture wasn't given to adorn sermons, but to form Christ in us. A community can be very expressive in worship and yet very fragile in biblical discernment. This is where many

deceptions arise: when emotion replaces discernment. The Bible, however, compels us to ask uncomfortable questions. Does this edify? Does this produce love? Does this honor the order God established? Does this submit to apostolic authority or evade it with pious phrases?

A biblical spirituality is also recognized by the centrality of Christ. Not experience, not the preacher, not the gift, not church culture. Christ. When the Holy Spirit works, He doesn't compete for the spotlight. His ministry is to glorify the Son, not entertain the congregation. That's why when a church is more interested in "feeling something" than resembling Christ, it has strayed from the path—even if it uses religious language. The Spirit doesn't lead us to depend on spiritual adrenaline but on grace.

Practically, this is clearly seen in the fruit. The fruit of the Spirit isn't a list to memorize, but a portrait to evaluate life. Love that doesn't fade when others fail. Joy that isn't dependent on circumstances. Peace that doesn't vanish in the first crisis. Patience—not resignation, but endurance under pressure. Kindness that softens interactions. Goodness that doesn't boast. Faithfulness that perseveres. Gentleness that doesn't force its way. Self-control that knows when to say "enough" when no one is watching.

The fruit isn't flashy, but it becomes unmistakable over time. A gift may appear momentarily; fruit is verified over months and years. And here, honesty is needed: it's not uncommon to find people with intense speeches but little gentleness, much religious confidence but little self-control, many expressions of "power" but few signs of patient love. When this happens, we're not facing a theological mystery. We're facing a disorder of priorities.

Authentic spirituality also embraces order. Order doesn't quench the Spirit; it honors Him. Paul was clear with the Corinthians because they confused freedom with chaos and confusion with spirituality. The Holy Spirit isn't the author of disorder. Therefore, a church that celebrates lack of control as if it were a sign of spiritual life has forgotten a basic mark of God's presence: the edification of the body. If what we do doesn't edify, no matter how intense it feels, it doesn't fulfill the purpose.

In pastoral practice, this brings a simple but profound change: we stop asking first, "What manifested?" and start asking, "What did it produce?" Did it produce genuine repentance? Reconciliation? Hunger for holiness? Humility? Love for the weak and the new believers? If the answer is no, the event may have been emotional, but not necessarily spiritual in the biblical sense.

I remember a conversation with a man who had been in the church for years. He was faithful in attendance and participated intensely in congregational prayer times. But his home was on the brink of collapse. Eventually, he confessed something simple yet hard: in public, he felt strong; in private, he didn't know how to ask for forgiveness. He had learned spiritual language but not gentleness. When he began surrendering to God in daily life, something happened that few celebrate as "revival": he started listening before responding, admitting sin without justifying it, seeking counsel, changing habits. His wife once said through tears, "Now I see you following Christ." That comment is worth more than a hundred testimonies of euphoria. Because that is evidence.

The same applies to community life. Healthy spirituality creates churches where the weak aren't crushed, where new believers aren't confused, where leaders don't become untouchable, and where sin isn't masked with noise. It also creates congregations where gifts are exercised with reverence—with interpretation when needed, with boundaries where Scripture demands, and with genuine concern for everyone's understanding. If someone leaves worship impressed but not instructed, moved but not edified, the church must ask whether it's feeding disciples or experience consumers.

This doesn't mean despising the charismatic or denying that God can work in extraordinary ways. It means putting everything in its proper place. Gifts are tools, not trophies. And the Spirit's presence isn't proven by something spectacular happening, but by life being conformed to Christ. The extraordinary may occur; what's indispensable is holiness. Besides, the extraordinary without obedience often produces pride. And pride is a spiritual poison that disguises itself easily.

Seeking biblical spirituality means recovering simple practices many consider "unspiritual," yet they're precisely what sustain faith. Consistent private prayer, not just noisy prayer. Scripture reading with hunger, not just isolated verses to support ideas. Confession and accountability, not just declarations of victory. Humble service, not just visible participation. Discreet generosity, not just offerings motivated by pressure or promises of multiplication—which is greed. Deliberate forgiveness, not just declarations of love. These disciplines don't draw attention, but they build character.

It also requires examining what we celebrate. If we celebrate those who "move" in worship more than those who live with integrity at work, we're fostering distorted values. If we applaud a moment of intensity more than a decade of faithfulness, we send a dangerous message to the church. God isn't impressed by our expressions; God looks at the heart. And the heart is revealed by its fruit.

Another aspect cannot be ignored: authentic spirituality learns to suffer well. It doesn't seek God only to avoid hardship, but to glorify Him in the midst of it. The Holy Spirit wasn't given solely for celebratory moments, but to sustain us when obedience is costly. A church that only knows how to be emotionally "high" but doesn't know how to stand firm in trials is immature. Spiritual maturity is evident when believers can say: "I don't understand everything, but I won't let go of Christ."

At this point, the question isn't whether believers can repeat an experience, but whether they can persevere. Not whether they can produce a particular sound, but whether they can control their tongue when anger tempts them. Not whether they can draw attention, but whether they can love those who give nothing in return. That's biblical. That's pastoral. That's real.

God is calling His people to an unmasked spirituality. Not a cold spirituality, but a substantive one. A spirituality that sings, yes, but also obeys. That prays passionately, yes, but also forgives. That believes in gifts, yes, but cherishes the fruit more. That gathers joyfully, yes, but lives in holiness from Monday to Saturday.

Those who seek the filling of the Spirit according to Scripture aren't desperate to prove something to others. Rather, they focus on abiding in Christ. Over time, that abiding becomes evident—not through an isolated sign, but through a life that changes. There, without excessive noise or need for demonstration, the church rediscovers what should always have been obvious: the evidence of the Spirit is the character of Christ being formed in us.

CONCLUSION

Throughout these pages, a tension has become evident—one many churches prefer not to confront: the gap between what the New Testament teaches about the Spirit's work and what, in practice, has become the unquestionable "proof" of spirituality. Tongues-speaking, elevated to a universal thermometer, has taken a place Paul never assigned it. And when a doctrine is sustained more by repetition than by biblical obedience, it eventually bears bitter fruit: confusion, comparison, guilt, religious pride, and—most gravely—a self-deception that risks the soul.

The decisive question isn't whether the gift of tongues exists or can manifest legitimately. The breaking point is another: Is it biblical to claim this gift is the normative evidence of the Spirit's filling? Examining 1 Corinthians and Galatians honestly, the answer is no. Paul presents gifts as diverse, distributed according to God's will, given to edify, and regulated by an order reflecting the Spirit's character. When the apostle asks, "Do all speak in tongues?" the text's logic implies a negative answer. Not all receive the same gift, so one cannot be demanded as a universal seal.

Yet in many congregations, a culture has developed where visible experience displaces quiet obedience. The noise is celebrated; the holy is ignored. The spontaneous is applauded; the discipline is scorned. Intensity is mistaken for anointing. And if someone doesn't reproduce the expected phenomenon, they're treated as a second-class believer or, worse, as someone who "doesn't yet have the Spirit." How many wounds have arisen from this pressure? How many

sensitive consciences have been pushed to mimic, pretend, or force a moment others promised as inevitable?

Facing this scenario, Paul doesn't just correct a practice—he redefines the priority. In 1 Corinthians 13, he places love as the supreme measure, not as poetic decoration between chapters. It's a doctrinal hinge. Without love, gifts lose value; without love, even what seems supernatural becomes noise. This chapter forces us to accept an uncomfortable truth: there can be spiritual activity without spiritual character. Manifestation without transformation. Religious language without Christlikeness.

It's also clear that 1 Corinthians 14 isn't permission for disorder, but guidance for edification. Paul doesn't forbid tongues, but situates them. He insists on interpretation, limits participation, orders turns, commands silence without an interpreter, and repeats a governing principle: "Let all things be done for edification." If a congregational practice contradicts this command, no matter how emotional it seems, it can't be justified as obedience to the Spirit. The Holy Spirit doesn't contradict Himself. He wouldn't inspire Paul to demand order while simultaneously promoting a church's disregard of those instructions as optional.

Over time, many have framed disobedience as spirituality, and this is no minor error. It's a shift in authority. Scripture no longer governs—tradition does. The question ceases to be "What did Paul say?" and becomes "What have we always done here?" And when tradition displaces the Word, the church becomes vulnerable to all kinds of excesses. Worship can turn into a stage where people learn to "feel" without learning to obey. The danger lies not only in external disorder but in the internal message it reinforces:

what matters is experiencing something, not being transformed.

This is why addressing religious self-deception was necessary. There are intense experiences that don't come from the Spirit, and there are sincere emotions that don't equate to holiness. A man may weep at an altar yet remain cruel at home. A woman may tremble in a meeting yet remain enslaved to bitterness. A leader may display impressive gifts while living without self-control. Which evidence carries more weight—what's visible for minutes or what endures over time? If the "proof" of being filled with the Spirit is reduced to a single episode, faith is left exposed to an episodic, fragile, and easily manipulated spirituality.

In contrast, Galatians 5 presents a different kind of evidence—deeper, less spectacular, and for that very reason, more reliable. The fruit of the Spirit isn't manufactured with techniques, mimicked under social pressure, or sustained by adrenaline. It's cultivated through communion with Christ, mortification of sin, daily obedience, and perseverance in private. Love that remains when no one applauds. Joy that doesn't depend on fleeting emotions. Peace that withstands conflict. Patience in traffic, at work, in family, and in dealing with the weak. Kindness in speech. Goodness when doing what's right is costly. Faith that shows itself in faithfulness, not just declarations. Gentleness that corrects without destroying. Self-control that extinguishes impulses before they set life ablaze.

This fruit is the hardest evidence to fake. A gift may manifest without maturity, but fruit reveals what truly governs the heart. Someone may speak with spiritual eloquence yet remain enslaved to lies. One can pray loudly and still justify

resentment. One can sing fervently and still feed immorality. In contrast, when the Spirit fills a person, their surroundings notice over time—even if that person isn't seeking to display themselves. In a pastoral visit, what speaks isn't the volume of prayer but the atmosphere of the home. In a difficult conversation, what evidences the Spirit isn't rapid Bible quoting but genuine meekness. In a financial crisis, what reveals God's work isn't a triumphalist phrase but peace accompanied by responsibility.

True evidence isn't comfortable, because it leaves us without excuses. It's easier to measure an experience than to examine character. Simpler to say "I've already been through that" than to admit "I still struggle with this." But the Gospel doesn't call us to collect episodes—it calls us to be conformed to Christ's image. Here, pastoral clarity is needed: the question isn't whether you once felt fire, but whether you're dying to sin today. The evidence isn't whether you had a moment, but whether your life is being renewed. The Spirit's filling isn't presumed—it's reflected.

In pastoral reality, this shift in focus brings both relief and confrontation. Relief for the sincere believer who loves the Lord but has lived under the shadow of undue demands. Such a person discovers God hasn't withheld His Spirit just because they haven't manifested a particular gift. They realize the Spirit's work was already there—in their perseverance, their rejection of sin, their desire to obey, their love for the church, their hunger for the Word. At the same time, it confronts those who relied on an external sign as a certificate of security while tolerating unrepentant sin. No one should rest spiritually because they "already spoke in tongues." If doctrine numbs the conscience, it isn't aiding salvation—it's endangering it.

When a church teaches a false evidence as normative, it inflicts two simultaneous harms. First, it elevates some for a manifestation and humiliates others for lacking it. Second, it lowers the standard of holiness by allowing an experience to substitute for obedience. Both contradict Paul's pastoral heart. In his letters, his constant concern isn't creating emotional atmosphere but forming a holy, orderly, edifying, Christ-centered people. The Holy Spirit wasn't given to manufacture superiority but to produce Christlikeness.

That's why recovering the biblical focus isn't merely a worship-style correction. It's a reformation of the church's heart. It means reverently asking again: What truly edifies? What produces holier disciples? What strengthens families, heals relationships, governs speech, purifies vision, and straightens conscience? It requires leaders to stop measuring "revival" by volume and learn to measure it by repentance, reconciliation, integrity, and obedience. It means the ordinary believer must stop pursuing signs as guarantees and start pursuing Christ as treasure.

Ultimately, the true evidence of the Holy Spirit's filling is as simple to state as it is demanding to live: a transformed life that reflects Christ's character. This isn't about denying gifts, but about putting them in their proper place. Not about quenching the Spirit, but rejecting the strange fire that doesn't produce holiness. Not about criticizing people, but correcting ideas that harm people. The Holy Spirit isn't a trophy to flaunt—He is God's power to die to self and live for Christ.

If anything should be engraved in our minds, it's this: God isn't seeking more impressive churches, but more faithful ones. He isn't seeking believers with a sign they can

recount, but believers with a cross they can carry. Evidence isn't reduced to a sound—it's confirmed on a path. And that path, though less spectacular, is infinitely more glorious: loving when it's hard, forgiving when it hurts, persevering when no one is watching, obeying when it costs, remaining pure when the world invites the opposite.

That is the filling heaven recognizes. That is the evidence the New Testament upholds. And that is the work the Spirit is willing to do in all who truly surrender: to form Christ in us, until the extraordinary isn't what comes from our mouths in a moment, but what's seen in our lives every day.

EPILOGUE

By the end of this book, the reader will have journeyed through a path that doesn't claim to offer definitive answers, but to open horizons of understanding, discernment, and encounter with revealed truth. Theology, as Barth reminded us, isn't a closed system but a continual movement toward God's living Word; and Christian spirituality, as Bonhoeffer taught well, isn't exhausted in reflection but embodied in concrete obedience.

This book has sought to position itself precisely in that space where rigorous reflection and practical life meet, dialogue, and enrich one another. The purpose of these pages was never to construct an exhaustive treatise but to offer a guide, a map, an invitation. Each chapter has attempted to

illuminate an aspect of Christian life from a biblical, theological, and pastoral perspective, aware that faith isn't lived in the abstract but in the complexity of human existence.

If one thing is clear by the conclusion of this work, it's that theology isn't an exercise reserved for specialists but a task for the whole Church: to ponder faith, discern God's will, interpret Scripture, and live it with integrity.

Throughout the book, the reader will have encountered echoes of various theological currents—from phenomenological hermeneutics to narrative theology, from the theology of hope to practical theology—not as academic displays but as tools to deepen understanding of biblical text and Christian experience. The intention has been to show that theological tradition isn't a museum but a living workshop where each generation contributes, questions, corrects, and learns.

Yet beyond the approaches, methodologies, or cited authors, what remains essential is the conviction that God continues to speak, guide, and shape His people. Scripture remains an inexhaustible well of wisdom, and the Christian community, a space where faith is discerned and lived in fellowship. Ultimately, this book is a testimony to that trust.

If these pages have stirred in the reader a desire to delve deeper into the Word, to think more clearly, to live more faithfully, and to serve more wholeheartedly, then their purpose has been fulfilled. Theology doesn't end here; rather, it begins anew each time a believer decides to listen, study, pray, and obey.

The path of faith is an ongoing process, a pilgrimage that doesn't conclude with reading a book but renews itself in every act of love, every ethical decision, every sincere search for truth. May this epilogue not be a full stop but a starting point. May what's learned become life; what's reflected upon become practice; what's understood inspire new questions, new searches, and fresh experiences of grace.

With gratitude for the privilege of sharing this journey with you, reader, I leave these pages in your hands, trusting that God will complete in you the work He has begun.

APPENDIX

History and Global Expansion of Pentecostalism.

Pentecostalism is one of the most dynamic, influential, and rapidly growing Christian movements in contemporary history. Its development wasn't sudden but the result of a series of spiritual, theological, and sociocultural processes dating back centuries. This appendix provides an overview of its historical evolution and global expansion.

1. Chronological Table of Pentecostalism's Emergence and Development

Date	Event/Movement	Description
1517–1600	Protestant Reformation	Rediscovery of biblical authority, personal faith experience, and the Holy Spirit's work.
1730–1790	Wesleyan and Methodist Revivals	John Wesley emphasizes sanctification, the "heart strangely warmed" experience, and the Holy Spirit's ongoing work.
1790–1840	Second Great Awakening (U.S.)	Expansion of Methodism, camp meetings, emphasis on

Date	Event/Movement	Description
		conversion and holiness.
1840–1880	Holiness Movement	Emerges within Methodism. Emphasizes the "second work of grace." Key figures: Phoebe Palmer, John Inskip.
1880–1900	Proto--Pentecostalism	Early searches for experiences similar to Acts 2. Charles Parham teaches about baptism in the Holy Spirit with initial evidence of tongues.
1901	Topeka, Kansas – Agnes Ozman	Agnes Ozman speaks in tongues at Parham's Bible school. Starting point of modern Pentecostalism.
1906–1909	Azusa Street Revival	Led by William J. Seymour. Multiracial, missionary, and global movement.
1910–1925	Formation of Pentecostal Denominations	Church of God (Cleveland), Assemblies of God (1914), COGIC, Pentecostal Holiness Church.
1930–	Doctrinal	Establishment of creeds, seminaries, and denominational

Date	Event/Movement	Description
1950	Consolidation	structures.
1947–1958	Divine Healing Movement	Evangelists like Oral Roberts, Branham, and A. A. Allen popularize healing campaigns.
1960	Charismatic Movement	Pentecostal experience enters historic churches.
1967	Catholic Charismatic Renewal	Students at Duquesne University experience "baptism in the Spirit."
1970–1990	Global Expansion	Explosive growth in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.
1994	Toronto Revival	"Toronto Blessing": emphasis on spiritual renewal and charismatic manifestations.
2000–Present	Global Pentecostalism	Over 650 million Pentecostals/charismatics worldwide. Influence on missions, liturgy, music, and culture.

2. Relevant Historical and Theological Notes

A. Roots in the Holiness Movement

The Wesleyan emphasis on sanctification and the transformative experience of the Holy Spirit prepared the doctrinal ground for Pentecostalism.

B. Charles Parham and Initial Evidence

Parham articulated the doctrine of "initial evidence" for baptism in the Holy Spirit: speaking in tongues.

C. William J. Seymour and Azusa Street

The Azusa revival was:

- multiracial,
- missionary-minded,
- spontaneous,
- deeply egalitarian,
- centered on Spirit experience.

Its global impact was immediate.

D. Diversification of Pentecostalism

Today three major streams are recognized:

1. Classical Pentecostalism
2. Charismatic Movement
3. Third Wave/Neo-Pentecostalism

3. Global Growth Map of Pentecostalism (Analytical Description by Region)

Below is a "narrative map" describing Pentecostal growth by region.

A. Latin America

The region with the highest proportional growth.

- Brazil: over 60 million Pentecostals/charismatics.
- Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador: accelerated growth since the 1980s.
- Chile and Argentina: influential revival movements.
- Mexico: sustained expansion in urban and rural areas.

Characteristics:

- strong emphasis on healing, deliverance, and intense worship;
- social impact in marginalized communities;
- emergence of mega-churches and apostolic networks.

B. Sub-Saharan Africa

One of the world's most dynamic regions.

- Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa: epicenters of African Pentecostalism.
- African independent churches combine Pentecostal elements with local cultural expressions.

Characteristics:

- emphasis on spiritual warfare;
- charismatic leadership;
- explosive urban growth.

C. Asia

Significant growth, particularly in:

- South Korea (Yoido Full Gospel Church, one of the world's largest congregations).
- China (house church movements with strong charismatic emphasis).
- Philippines and Indonesia: sustained expansion.

Characteristics:

- intense spirituality;
- strong emphasis on prayer and fasting;
- emerging missionary movements.

D. North America

- United States: birthplace of modern Pentecostalism.
- Canada: significant charismatic influence since the 1960s.

Characteristics:

- denominational diversity;

- influence on contemporary Christian music;
- renewal movements.

E. Europe

Slower but steady growth.

- United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Nordic countries show charismatic expansion.
- African and Latin American migration has revitalized European churches.

Characteristics:

- emphasis on cultural integration;
- liturgical renewal;
- urban presence.

F. Oceania

- Australia and New Zealand: influential charismatic movements (Hillsong, C3).
- Pacific Islands: strong Pentecostal presence.

4. Importance of Pentecostalism in the Contemporary World

- It is the fastest-growing Christian movement in modern history.
- It has influenced global music, liturgy, missions, and spirituality.

- It has generated new forms of leadership, community, and evangelism.
- It has contributed to Christianity's expansion in the Global South.

Final Commentary: The Urgency of Sound Practice

When considering Pentecostalism's global reach—a movement now encompassing hundreds of millions of believers across all continents—the importance of doctrinal and pastoral responsibility becomes evident. A proper understanding of the Holy Spirit's work does not merely affect isolated individuals, but **entire peoples**, **whole cultures**, and **complete generations** that have been shaped by teachings, practices, and traditions that sometimes deviate from biblical witness.

Therefore, the need for **sound theological practice**, grounded in Scripture and guided by responsible hermeneutics, is more urgent than ever. These are not abstract academic debates or superficial denominational differences—they concern the spiritual lives of millions who have often received a distorted vision of what the Spirit's filling truly means. When experience replaces truth, when emotion supersedes obedience, when gifts eclipse fruit, the result is a fragile, vulnerable spirituality easily manipulated.

Scripture solemnly warns about the consequences of misdirected faith. Jesus' words—"Depart from me; I never knew you"—were not directed at atheists or pagans, but at people who **believed** they were walking in truth while their

practice remained disconnected from God's will. This warning should produce not fear but discernment; not condemnation but a call to faithfulness.

For this reason, this appendix presents not just history but also a reminder: **theology matters**, doctrine matters, practice matters. Pentecostalism's numerical growth does not guarantee spiritual health. Only faith rooted in Scripture, led by the Spirit, and lived with integrity can sustain the Church amid present and future challenges.

May this historical and global study be not merely informative but transformative. May it move leaders, pastors, and believers to examine their faith, correct what must be corrected, and walk humbly and truthfully before God. For this concerns not just a few, but **millions of souls** needing to know the Spirit's authentic, profound, sanctifying work.

THEOLOGICAL GLOSSARY (ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

A

Apostolicity

The Church's quality affirming continuity with apostolic teaching, mission, and authority. Refers not merely to institutional succession but to doctrinal and practical faithfulness.

Revival

A spiritual movement characterized by renewal, repentance, fervor, and manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Historically associated with social transformation and missionary expansion.

B

Baptism in the Holy Spirit

A post-conversion spiritual experience, understood in classical Pentecostalism as empowerment for service and witness. Often associated with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues.

Bibliology

Theological discipline that studies the nature, inspiration, authority, and formation of Scripture.

C

Charisms

Spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit for the edification of the Church (1 Cor 12). Include gifts of speech, service, healing, miracles, discernment, among others.

Charisma (χάρισμα)

From Greek *charis* ("grace"). Spiritual gift granted by divine grace. Includes gifts of service, speech, healing, miracles, etc.

Christology

Branch of theology studying the person and work of Jesus Christ: his divinity, humanity, mission, death, resurrection, and reign.

D

Discernment

Ability given by the Spirit to distinguish between true and false, holy and profane, what comes from God and what does not.

Doctrine

Set of fundamental teachings defining the Christian faith. Its function is to guide practice, protect truth and direct spiritual life.

Dynamis (δύναμις)

"Power," "strength," "ability." Used in Acts 1:8 to describe the Holy Spirit's power.

E

Ecclesiology

Theological study of the Church: its nature, mission, structure, sacraments, and role in the world.

Ekklēsia (ἐκκλησία)

"Called out." Greek term for "church," implying a community summoned by God.

Eschatology

Doctrine of "last things": Christ's second coming, resurrection, final judgment, God's kingdom, and history's consummation.

Initial evidence

Classical Pentecostal doctrine teaching that speaking in tongues is the first outward sign of baptism in the Holy Spirit.

F

Fruit of the Spirit

Ethical and spiritual transformation produced by the Holy

Spirit in believers (Gal. 5:22–23). Evidence of Christian maturity and character.

G

Glossolalia

Speaking in tongues. In classical Pentecostalism, considered initial evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit; in other contexts, one spiritual gift among many.

Grace

God's unmerited favor toward humanity. Includes salvation, forgiveness, transformation, and power for Christian living.

H

Hermeneutics

Discipline studying principles and methods of biblical interpretation. Includes historical–grammatical, literary, phenomenological, and narrative approaches.

Phenomenological hermeneutics

Approach recognizing interaction between text and reader's experience, highlighting the opening of "possible worlds."

Historical–grammatical hermeneutics

Biblical interpretation method seeking to understand the text

according to its original historical, cultural, and linguistic context.

Holiness Movement

19th-century movement emphasizing sanctification and holy living. Forms the doctrinal root of modern Pentecostalism.

I

Biblical inspiration

Doctrine affirming Scripture is God-inspired and thus authoritative and reliable for faith and practice.

J

Justification

Divine declaration that sinners are made righteous through faith in Christ. A legal act, not a process.

K

Koinonia (κοινωνία)

Communion, participation, spiritual fellowship. Describes the Church's communal life and union with Christ.

L

Filling of the Spirit

Ongoing state of dependence, obedience, and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. Unlike baptism in the Spirit, filling is repeated and progressive.

M

Biblical metanarrative

The Bible's grand story: creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. Central focus in contemporary narrative theology.

Metanoia (μετάνοια)

Profound repentance involving change of mind, direction, and purpose. Not merely remorse but inner transformation.

Missio Dei

"The mission of God." Theological concept affirming mission is not a human project but God's work in the world, in which the Church participates.

Mission

The Church's participation in God's purpose for the world, encompassing evangelism, discipleship, justice, mercy, and social transformation.

N

Nephesh (נֶפֶשׁ)

"Soul," "life," "living being." A holistic concept encompassing emotions, will, and existence.

P

Parakletos (παράκλητος)

"Comforter," "advocate," "intercessor." Title of the Holy Spirit in John's Gospel.

Pentecostalism

Christian movement emerging in the early 20th century, characterized by emphasis on baptism in the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, and direct experience with God.

Pneuma (πνεῦμα)

"Spirit," "breath," "wind." In the NT refers to the Holy Spirit and spiritual life.

Pneumatology

Branch of theology studying the person and work of the Holy Spirit: his nature, gifts, fruit, filling, and action in the Church.

Praxis

The lived practice of faith. In theology, refers to the integration of doctrine, spirituality, and ethical action.

Regeneration

New birth produced by the Holy Spirit. Inner transformation initiating the Christian life.

Revelation

Action through which God makes himself known. Includes general revelation (creation) and special revelation (Scripture and Christ).

Ruach (רוּחַ)

"Wind," "breath," "spirit." In the OT refers to God's Spirit giving life, power, and direction.

S

Sanctification

Process by which believers are transformed into Christ's image. In Pentecostalism, understood as the Spirit's progressive work.

Progressive sanctification

Continuing dimension of sanctification, lasting throughout the believer's life.

Shekinah (שְׁכִינָה)

Rabbinic term describing God's manifest presence dwelling among his people.

Shalom (שָׁלוֹם)

Peace, wholeness, comprehensive well-being. Not merely absence of conflict but harmony with God, others, and self.

Soteriology

Doctrine of salvation: justification, regeneration, sanctification, and glorification.

T

Theology of hope

Movement associated with Jürgen Moltmann emphasizing the future, transformative dimension of God's kingdom.

Narrative theology

Approach interpreting the Bible as a grand redemptive story in which believers participate.

Practical theology

Discipline integrating theological reflection with the Church's life and mission. Includes preaching, pastoral care, liturgy, and ethics.

U

Anointing

Spiritual empowerment granted by God for a specific task.

Not a feeling but divine enablement.

V

Life in the Spirit

Lifestyle characterized by obedience, dependence, discernment, and manifestation of the Spirit's fruit.

X

Xenolalia (ξένος + λαλία)

Phenomenon where a person speaks an actual human language never learned. In early Pentecostal accounts, interpreted as a gift for evangelizing other language groups. Distinguished from glossolalia.

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